

The Gateway Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133114
Local Authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	334616
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	875
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Cleland
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Sadler
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2008
Academy address	Marshfoot Road Chadwell-St-Mary Tilbury Essex RM16 4LU
Telephone number	01375 489000
Fax number	01375 489001

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The academy was invited to provide a nominee to the inspection team and the vice principal accepted this responsibility.

Description of the school

Currently slightly smaller than average, however, the number of students at the academy continues to rise. Sixth form provision will be offered for the first time in September 2009. The students' social and economic background indicators are generally below average. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is approaching three times the national average. The numbers of girls and boys in each year group varies annually. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average and the number of students whose first language is not English is well below average. The proportion of students registered by the academy as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is high. There are a small number of looked after children in each year group.

The academy specialisms are the Arts, Design and Engineering. It has received the following national accreditations: the Every Child Matters Silver Award, Healthy Schools Award, the Inclusion Quality Mark, and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 3

The Gateway Academy provides a satisfactory education with a number of good features. The academy has made good progress since opening in September 2006; the senior leadership team has done well to improve standards and significantly enhance the range of curriculum opportunities.

Although standards are below national average they are rising rapidly; students now make the progress expected for their age. The 2008 GCSE results confirmed the positive impact of the academy provision; student progress is significantly stronger and examination outcomes were notably more positive than those secured by the predecessor schools. Examination outcomes already secured for 2009, notably in English, information and communication technology (ICT), and mathematics are closer to the national average than those reached in previous years. Current standards show further improvement and are likely to be above the National Challenge benchmark. Achievement is satisfactory and some students are now making good progress; however, the quality of presentation and the guidance provided on developing literacy skills in subjects other than English varies.

The students' personal development is good. Attendance has improved significantly to a point close to the national average. Behaviour is good. The academy has not excluded a single student in the current academic year. Parents and students commented positively on the improvement in behaviour in recent years. One young person summarised the views expressed by many saying 'this is a warm, friendly and peaceful place'. Care, welfare and guidance are satisfactory and the developments being made in academic guidance are a positive feature although the work of the inclusion team is not sufficiently aligned with the academy's focus on teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with nearly half the lessons seen judged to be good or better; however, many lessons could have been more effective if the match of task to the students' learning needs had been stronger. Where opportunities to enhance teaching and learning were missed, insufficient attention was given within some lesson plans and their delivery to the quality of learning, student involvement and/or independent learning.

The curriculum is good with strong pathways that match provision to ability and provide very good access to the new national Diploma courses. Community cohesion is satisfactory because of the development within the academy of the 'four college' structure and the efforts being made to reach out to feeder schools and the local community.

Leadership and management are good overall. Good progress has been made on the areas for improvement given at the academy monitoring inspection because of the impact of good curriculum development on standards and on students' personal development. Governance is good; setting the academy challenging targets and encouraging the development of a strong community presence. The academy's capacity to improve is good.

What the academy should do to improve further

Ensure that a higher proportion of teaching reflects that of the best available within the academy by:

- focusing attention on how well students are learning in lessons
- ensuring that lesson plans, designed to meet students' varying needs, capabilities and preferred ways of working, are fully implemented

- celebrating and disseminating good practice widely across faculties
- raising expectations for the quality and presentation of students' written work and developing literacy skills in subjects other than English.
- Bring the work of the inclusion team more closely in line with the teaching and learning team to ensure the integration of support within classroom practice.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The 2008 GCSE outcomes were significantly below the national average reflecting the students' low attainment on entry and the many disruptions to their previous education. However, the 2008 figures provide clear evidence of improvement since the academy opened. When measured against the students' relative attainment, the educational value added improved significantly from the previous year to a position just above the national average. Student progress improved significantly in Key Stage 4.

The girls' examination outcomes were more positive than those of the boys. Students in receipt of free academy meals underperformed but those whose first language was believed to be other than English did well. Students requiring additional support from the academy and outside agencies underachieved but those with a statement of special educational needs also did well. Students from African or Caribbean backgrounds were amongst the most successful in the academy, performing well above the national average. These variations in standards and achievement reflect the evolving impact of new strategies and reorganised provision.

A review of the academy's robust evidence base and the outcomes of the 2009 GCSE or vocational courses already secured, point to continued improvements in standards, notably in English, mathematics, design and technology, engineering and the arts. The academy came close to meeting its targets in art, drama and media last year and exceeded them in music.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The Gateway Academy is a harmonious, inclusive and welcoming community where different cultures are respected and relationships between students and staff are positive. Students are proud to attend the academy, are enthusiastic about the exciting range of courses, fun events and extra-curricular activities. They very much appreciate the attractive and well-resourced learning environment. They believe strongly that these features assist their learning, alongside the care shown by staff in supporting their success. It is evident from discussions with students, that aspirations are rising and they have greater confidence and belief in their abilities. This is reflected in improved attendance, now close to average and a sharp reduction in the number of students persistently absent, or excluded. Behaviour is good and improved as a result of clearer expectations, a popular rewards system and an impressive range of support programmes designed to meet the needs of vulnerable learners. However, guidance to support these learners is not used consistently well by class teachers.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good because staff and students embrace the core values that underpin the academy's ethos. Students respect and

tolerance is evident in the good relationships and interactions between different racial groups. Assemblies and citizenship courses make a particularly strong contribution to students' development with many special events which broaden horizons, such as the Chinese opera. Leaders recognise that this aspect can be strengthened further through coordinated opportunities across the curriculum. Charitable fund-raising activities enable good links with local and worldwide communities and there are emerging links with primary schools.

The promotion of healthy lifestyles is successful. Students understand the importance of making healthy choices and this is supported by an impressive range of popular sporting activities. Students of all ages express their views confidently. They feel safe and have confidence that staff will deal with any incidents rapidly. They say that the mixed-age tutor system helps them to meet new people and provides a ready made support system for advice, support and information. Students readily take on responsibilities and roles linked to the 'four college' system and participate in inter-college competitions. These features provide useful opportunities for social and leadership development, which students enjoy. Such skills and experiences contribute to their economic well-being as do the vocational courses and students' confidence in the use of ICT.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory though variable in quality across most faculties. Inspectors observed 56 lessons across all faculties involving two thirds of the teaching staff and students of all ages. Inspectors' judgement of teaching confirms the academy's evaluation that most teaching is satisfactory; almost half is good or better but weaknesses prevail in a minority of lessons.

Senior leaders have taken relevant and appropriate action to promote good practice and reduce the proportion of weak teaching. This is beginning to bear fruit through a range of well-chosen initiatives, including regular observations of full lessons and some shorter drop-in visits to classes. Teaching is notably stronger than at the time of the academy monitoring inspection. Teachers are directed towards the improvements required, supported with training opportunities and provided with clear targets to achieve within reasonable timescales. The proportion of good and outstanding teaching has improved since the last inspection. Typically, students in these classes benefit from teaching that focuses strongly on learning. Varied approaches and exciting activities take fully into account students' prior learning and their needs, capabilities and preferred ways of working. Learning is placed in context for students so that they understand its relevance to their everyday lives. This leads to high levels of student engagement and productivity. The hive of industry in these lessons is indicative of the students' enjoyment and the good progress that they make. The best teaching is not always celebrated and disseminated widely enough as a model of excellent practice for others to aspire to.

Where teaching fails to achieve this quality, the challenge provided and the level of independent learning required is too limited.

The strength of relationships between students and staff is consistently good. Most teachers manage students' behaviour well so that time is used productively. Students behave appropriately and are responsive to guidance and support. Teaching assistants are helpful and react appropriately to need but are under deployed in most lessons. Lessons run smoothly; are

appropriately structured and students usually know what they are about to learn. The academy's very good ICT provision is used advantageously to support learning. However, expectations regarding the quality and presentation of written work are too variable, even within teaching groups, resulting in work that is generally of mediocre quality. Marking is inconsistent but improving because it is beginning to point students towards improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The academy provides a good curriculum which is flexible, inclusive and increasingly tailored to meet students' needs. Statutory requirements are met and are complemented by an extensive range of daily enrichment activities, school visits and events that add significantly to students' enjoyment. Careful monitoring is ensuring that newly introduced courses are relevant to local circumstances and are increasingly matched to learners' abilities and interests. This is having a direct impact on students' attendance, achievement and enjoyment. In both key stages, students follow one of four pathways designed to give all learners, including the most able and those that find learning difficult, the opportunity to succeed. A small but significant number of students in Years 7 and 8 receive good additional support to accelerate their reading skills, develop competency in literacy and numeracy, and promote their social and emotional well-being.

In Key Stage 4, students choose from an extensive range of GCSE and vocational awards. This, and the first-class facilities available gives the curriculum a strong work-related dimension and is providing students with the skills they need to pursue further education or gain employment in the local area. All Year 10 students complete a two-week work experience. Arrangements are increasingly flexible; a significant number of students in Years 10 and 11 who sat GCSE examinations in English and mathematics in Year 10 have already attained a higher grade GCSE. The majority of students achieve the equivalent of a GCSE C grade in an ICT-based course by the end of Year 11. 'Focused Fridays' allow students to reinforce their learning in key areas and experience other opportunities such as enterprise education and work in the local community. The 'Gateway Connect' provision offers good alternative arrangements for a small minority of the most challenging students not suited to GCSE studies. This is helping to boost their self-esteem, retain their engagement in learning and secure their future economic well-being.

Proposals to establish a sixth form in September 2009 are proceeding to plan, based on the academy's specialisms in the Arts and engineering as well as in ICT and sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The academy has worked relentlessly to provide a safe, supportive and caring environment for its students. A dedicated team works closely together to ensure that all students are supported appropriately, including those that are vulnerable. As one parent wrote, 'My child seems safe and enjoys going to school,' and another, 'The school has been very supportive to both of us.' The academy has effective systems in place to support students' pastoral needs. The induction programme helps students to settle quickly when they join the academy. The procedures for monitoring students' progress are well used to set challenging targets, but these are not always used effectively and consistently across departments or classrooms. Academic guidance is satisfactory overall. The academy works hard to raise the aspirations of its students and, in particular, to promote the advantages of further and higher education to both students and

their parents. Students believe they have good advice about their future options and career choices at an early stage.

The inclusion team works hard to support a large number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A range of intervention strategies are deployed; however, individual education plans are not consistently utilised by all staff. Subsequently, the needs of individual students are not always fully met.

The academy fulfils all requirements for the safeguarding of students. There are clear procedures for child protection and relevant staff and governors have had recent training in this area. Vulnerable students are particularly well cared for through excellent links and working relationships with outside agencies. The inclusive ethos underpins the work of the academy. It embraces and celebrates diversity in the school, which is a well-ordered and very supportive community where different beliefs and values are respected.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Since the academy opened it has made good progress. The development of effective curriculum provision has been a key factor in the significant improvement evident in standards and achievement and in the quality of teaching. The strength of the specialism, especially in the arts, and in the developments of vocational learning through engineering and ICT are particularly significant. The improvements secured in the students' personal development and most notably in behaviour where the need for exclusion has been eliminated, were a feature of an above average proportion of positive parental responses to the inspection questionnaire. The academy provides satisfactory value for money.

Quality assurance procedures are appropriate and the use of assessment information to inform management decisions is good, although variations in the use of this data exist at departmental and classroom level. The development plan is very clear, reflecting agreed priorities. Resource management is good and the academy runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Budgetary difficulties have been resolved with the support of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

The academy provided a senior management team nominee to join the inspection team; the vice principal played a full part in the inspection process. Senior managers were involved in the joint observations of lessons with inspectors. An evaluation of the outcomes of this exercise revealed the need for a greater focus on the quality of learning. Senior managers direct improvement and promote the well-being of learners through satisfactory care, guidance and support. The governance of the academy is good. The manner in which senior leaders and governors responded to substantial challenges of commissioning, and running a new building has been impressive. Community cohesion is satisfactory. Senior staff have built a successful establishment that is now reaching out to its local community and beyond.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

3 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Gateway Academy, Greys, RM16 4LU

It was a pleasure to visit the academy recently and see how much progress you have made. Some of my colleagues and I were present on the day you moved into the new building and it was lovely to see how well you have settled in and how rapidly you are making progress. The inspection team was impressed by the good range of opportunities particularly in ICT, in vocational courses like engineering and the arts provided by the academy.

A great many of you took the time to offer your views on the improvements you recognised in teaching, support and the resources provided and how much you appreciated the work of Mr Sadler, the principal, and the staff who support you. Many of your parents took the trouble to write to me and comment on the progress you are now making as well as praising the opportunities and support the academy provides; please thank your parents for contributing to this inspection.

The inspection team were very impressed with your behaviour, both in class and around the site with many of you showing maturity and thought for others. Well done.

I have asked the academy to continue to improve teaching by:

- focusing on how well you are learning in lessons
- planning to support a wider range of your learning needs and preferred ways of working in some lessons
- celebrating and sharing good practice across faculties.

You can play your part by presenting written work as clearly and accurately as possible. I hope I have the opportunity to visit the academy at some point in the future, it was a pleasure to meet so many of you.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector