

North Cambridge Academy

Arbury Road, Kings Hedges, Cambridge, CB4 2JF

Inspection dates 10–11 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The Principal's leadership, and that of other senior leaders and governors, has had a transformational impact on standards of behaviour, the quality of teaching, and the amount of progress most students make over time.
- Leaders have established a culture of high ambition. Their determination to challenge and support students effectively is resulting in a rapidly increasing proportion who achieve at least five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Results are now above the national average.
- Over time, teaching in many subjects has enabled most groups of students to make at least good progress. Leaders are relentless and successful in pursuing high standards. Teaching is particularly effective in English, humanities subjects, music, modern foreign languages and art.
- Leaders, including governors, have ensured that the academy is a safe environment. Students are very well cared for and arrangements to support those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are highly effective.
- Students behave well around the academy site, and their good relationships with each other and their teachers help contribute to the progress they make. Disruption to learning is rare; in the words of one student, 'it's now cool to want to learn.'
- Students take advantage of the very wide range of cultural, sporting and other activities that the academy provides. This contributes to their personal development; many develop new interests and skills, including the ability to lead. Many also develop new ambitions, and the motivation to pursue them.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always use the information they hold on students' prior achievement to plan interesting activities that are of the right level of difficulty for all groups. This has limited the progress of some students over time, particularly in science.
- Sometimes, students continue to make mistakes because feedback on their work does not make clear how they can improve, or because they are not given the opportunity to make the changes needed.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 30 lessons or parts of lessons, and during tutor periods and assemblies. Several lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed behaviour during lessons, break periods and as students moved around the academy site.
- Inspectors analysed academy documentation, including that relating to: attendance, exclusions, safeguarding, behaviour, the academy’s systems for improving teaching and learning, records of the academy’s self-evaluation and improvement planning, and details of its use of additional funding to support disadvantaged students.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to the online, Parent View survey in addition to the academy’s own survey results of parental opinion, and the 40 responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors held discussions with the Principal, other senior and subject leaders, teaching staff, members of the governing body and academy trust, and groups of students.

Inspection team

Jason Howard, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

David Davies

Additional Inspector

Cheryl Jackson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The North Cambridge Academy, which is part of the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust, converted to become an academy on 1 September 2013. When its predecessor school, the Manor Foundation School, was last inspected by Ofsted in 2010, it was judged to be good.
- This is a smaller than the average-sized secondary academy.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- Almost half of students are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and students who are looked after by the local authority. This proportion is significantly above the national average.
- The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is higher than the national average.
- The academy makes use of alternative provision at County School, Cambridge for a very small number of students.
- The academy receives the Year 7 catch-up funding for a number of students who did not reach the expected Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 national tests.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A large number of teachers left the academy at the end of the last academic year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to raise attainment in all subjects, including science, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use the information they have about what students already know and can do to plan engaging activities that provide appropriate challenge to all groups of students and that ensure any gaps in students' knowledge and understanding close quickly
 - improve the quality of the feedback they give to students about their work so that it makes clear what they need to do to improve it, and ensure students both have the opportunity to act on this advice and do so.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The Principal's belief that every individual can and will succeed is shared by all leaders and teachers, and also by the overwhelming majority of students, including many who have previously lacked this conviction. His determination and drive, and that of governors and other leaders, ensure that barriers preventing students from making the maximum progress possible are quickly removed. Consequently, students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and standards are rising very rapidly.
- The academy's ethos is that all students, including those who are disadvantaged, will have, and take, the opportunities to develop their broader interests and talents. Leaders ensure all students are able to engage in new experiences and activities, including via the innovative and popular '99 things to do before you're 12 and three quarters' programme. In this way, leaders aid students' personal development and promote equality of opportunity well.
- Leaders offer teachers high quality training and support, drawing on expertise within the academy trust's other academies as appropriate. The academy's monitoring information indicates this is improving the impact teaching has on learning. Leaders also take difficult decisions when necessary. As a result the quality of teaching has continued to improve rapidly.
- The academy's curriculum is broad and balanced. Students have access to a wide variety of different courses, including construction, dance, drama and law. Leaders have lengthened the academy day so that students can choose to learn additional subjects, participate in activities, or gain extra help with English or mathematics during 'session six.' Participation rates are high, as are rates of progress. Leaders constantly review the curriculum and make changes that ensure it meets the needs and interests of all.
- The curriculum prepares students for life in modern Britain well, and makes an excellent contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Students learn about the struggle for the vote and the development of Britain's democracy within history lessons; they also consider key contemporary issues around the protection of essential rights and freedoms and racial and religious intolerance. They demonstrate respect towards those of different faiths, or whose lifestyles are different to their own. They develop values that enable them to fully appreciate the diverse nature of life in modern Britain.
- Leaders carefully monitor the progress that different groups of students are making, ensure those who need it receive additional help, and check its impact in great detail. Subject leaders, including several who have been appointed recently, are driving up standards in their areas of responsibility, with the support of senior leaders. This is helping to ensure that most teachers quickly identify and support those students who need to catch up. As a result, students' rates of progress are accelerating, including in areas where the impact of teaching has previously been uneven, such as science.
- Leaders have used research evidence about the kinds of support that best boost students' progress to target their use of pupil premium funding effectively. In many year groups, disadvantaged students are making at least as rapid progress as their peers in a number of subjects as a result. This funding is also used to ensure that disadvantaged students enjoy the same cultural and other opportunities as the other students.
- Leaders monitor the progress, attendance and behaviour of the small number of students who attend alternative provision very carefully.
- Careers education is of good quality and helps students to understand the range of educational and employment opportunities available to them, and the qualifications and skills that they will need in order to realise their individual ambitions. This encourages many to understand the value of educational attainment, to aim high, and to make informed choices about their post-16 education. Academy leaders ensure groups of students can gain work experience in their chosen careers or professions via strong links with major local employers in both the private and public sectors. Very few students are not in employment, education or training after leaving the academy.

■ Additional staffing provided by the academy trust has helped to raise standards within several departments, including English. The Principals of the trust's other academies help senior leaders and governors to check standards; effective teaching techniques are shared between colleagues across the trust. Leaders of the same subject areas regularly meet together and confirm the accuracy of the grades being applied to students' work. This has helped to establish very accurate predictions about how well students will perform. The trust also provides legal, financial and other sources of support. This has allowed leaders to focus their attention on driving forward very rapid improvements in teaching, behaviour and achievement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body's ambition and strategic input have played a critical role in shaping and supporting the changes that leaders have made to improve standards at the academy. The arrangements governors make for the safeguarding of students meet statutory requirements and are highly effective. Trustees and governors receive regular updates about the quality of teaching and its impact upon learning, which they supplement with reports from their own visits and those of senior colleagues who work in other trust schools. They use this information to reward teachers who meet their individual targets and who help their students to make exceptional progress. Trustees and governors hold senior leaders to account via their regular checks on how much progress different groups of students are making; this ensures that any decline in standards becomes evident quickly. They investigate any such issues and take robust action where underperformance is identified, with notable impact.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They are polite, welcoming, wear their uniform with pride and conduct themselves well during break periods and as they move between lessons. They arrive punctually at the start of the day and to lessons and come ready to learn. Students treat the academy site with respect; there is very little litter or graffiti.
- Disruption to learning is rare, whether students are working on their own or working with groups. Students typically listen carefully to their teachers, with whom they have good relationships, and are quick to follow instructions. Leaders and teachers work highly effectively with students who find it difficult to manage their behaviour, so that they can stay in class as far as possible, and continue to make progress without disrupting the learning of others.
- The academy's use of temporary exclusion has declined over time, as leaders' high expectations for behaviour have become firmly established. During the inspection, many spoke of the transformation in attitudes to learning and classroom behaviour since the academy opened. There are few incidences of serious misbehaviour. Students are motivated by the recognition and rewards that they receive for behaving well, working hard and making a positive difference to the academy community.
- Many students help to promote the well-being, personal development or learning of others. In 2014, students raised over £5000 for charity by leading and managing a number of events. Students develop their leadership skills, and make a positive contribution to the academy community, through their work in a variety of roles. These include acting as form and sports captains, and as mentors who help others with their learning.
- The academy's monitoring indicates that the small number of students who attend off-site provision attend and behave well, and are kept safe.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Students feel, and are, safe, secure and valued. Governors are trained in 'safer-recruitment' procedures and have established exemplary ways of establishing the suitability of those who visit, volunteer in, or work at the academy. Teachers' annual safeguarding training means they know what to do if concerns about any students arise.

- Students have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe, and know how to minimise risks, including those involved in using the internet and social networking sites. The curriculum provides guidance on how to stay physically safe, and how to manage stress and stay emotionally healthy. Thorough risk assessments are completed before students take part in trips.
- The academy's monitoring information indicates that behaviour of a bullying or racist nature is rare; students confirm this and are confident that any incidents that do occur are tackled quickly so that they are not sustained. They can report bullying in a number of ways, including making contact with the academy online and outside of school time; this alerts leaders to any issues very quickly. The use of homophobic or otherwise unacceptable language is extremely rare; none was heard during this inspection.
- The academy's leaders work extensively, and highly effectively, with other agencies and ensure that vulnerable students are very well supported. They follow up cases of persistent or unexpected absence carefully, robustly and with impact; rates of persistent absence have halved in under a year and overall rates of attendance continue to rise.
- The academy makes arrangements to support students whose circumstances suggest they may be vulnerable for some time after they begin their post-16 studies at another local academy or college. This helps them to settle in and adapt to new routines and ways of studying. Drop-out rates are low. Similar arrangements help those who join the academy in Year 7 to make a strong start.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time in the majority of subjects has enabled most groups of students to make good, or better progress. Teachers typically use their enthusiasm and strong subject knowledge to devise well-planned and varied activities that engage students' interest and ensure all groups can move forward. Effective teaching has had a particularly strong impact on the rates of progress made by the least able students in English and mathematics.
- Teachers' explanations are generally clear; very often, teachers demonstrate what a successful piece of work should contain or include before asking students to complete it. In a Year 10 English lesson, this technique helped students structure a paragraph with clarity, supporting their arguments with evidence, and consider the strength of alternative viewpoints.
- Teachers establish high expectations; most make it very clear what students need to do next in order to achieve a higher level or grade. Most use the information they have about students' prior achievement to plan activities that enable those of all abilities to move forward. The majority of teachers discuss work with individual students well, check they understand any written feedback, and give them time to redraft work or make corrections. This technique helped some of the least able students to move on quickly during a Year 9 mathematics lesson.
- Students are willing to ask for help, or explain when they do not understand, because they have good relationships with their teachers. Teachers typically respond by changing explanations or activities and ensure they have helped close gaps in students' understanding before moving them on to new work. Questioning is often used effectively to encourage students to develop their thinking, or to help the teacher work out why they have made a mistake.
- Additional support to help those who struggle to read well when they join the academy has a significant impact in enabling many students to engage with learning and make rapid progress across a range of subjects. Many benefit from the intensive support they receive in English and mathematics within small classes. The promotion of reading for pleasure, in partnership with the local library, has led to one of the largest increases in visits to any library recorded nationally, and an increase in book borrowing. Leaders have detailed plans in place to develop the curriculum, which include measures to develop the promotion of students' numeracy.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make comparable progress to others because of the effective support they usually receive from teaching assistants.

- A small proportion of teaching over time promotes limited progress because activities do not interest students, and their attention drifts. At times, some students are asked to complete work that is too easy or too difficult for them because teachers do not always use information about their prior attainment well enough when planning activities. Feedback on students' work does not always make clear what it is that they need to do in order to improve. Sometimes when feedback is clear, students do not get the opportunity to make the necessary corrections, so continue to make the same mistakes. Over time, some students have made slow progress in science because of weaknesses in teaching. Recent changes in staffing and leadership have had demonstrable impact but some gaps in students' knowledge and understanding remain.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the academy with attainment that is below average. Most make good, and often better than expected progress and achieve results at GCSE that are above the national average in a number of subjects, once students' 'best', as opposed to 'first', entries are taken into account.
- The proportion of students gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics has risen to six out of ten in 2014. A significantly higher proportion of the least able students attained A* to C grades in English and mathematics in 2014 than was the case nationally. Some students made less than expected progress in science, though current students are making better progress because of recent improvements in teaching and leadership.
- The academy has made use of early GCSE entry in English and mathematics. This has not placed a ceiling on any student's level of attainment. Careful analysis of first entry results has enabled teachers to help students fill gaps in their knowledge and understanding before resitting. As a result of this, a high proportion of students gained better grades when they took these examinations again. These outcomes are not reflected in published performance data.
- Disadvantaged students' attainment at GCSE has improved dramatically. In 2012 less than 10% gained at least five A* to C grades including English and mathematics; in 2014, just over four in ten did so – above the national average for this group of students. A higher proportion of disadvantaged students gained an A* to C grade in English than was the case for non-disadvantaged students nationally.
- Disadvantaged students' rates of progress were below that of others in the academy and nationally in mathematics, but slightly above those of others nationally in English. The gap between disadvantaged students' attainment in English and that of others at the academy and nationally, was approximately half a grade; in mathematics the gap was just over a grade. The academy's monitoring data, and scrutiny of students' work, indicates that gaps are narrowing quickly because of improvements in teaching.
- The progress of students for whom English is an additional language is good overall, and their attainment is in line with that of their peers.
- The progress made by the small number of students educated off site is monitored carefully. These students usually make at least good progress from their starting points.
- The academy's monitoring information and scrutiny of students' work indicates that disabled students and those who have special educational needs usually make good, and sometimes exceptional, progress from their individual starting points. Effective support within lessons means these students progress at a rate comparable to that of their peers.
- The most able students attain well and make good progress overall. In 2014, all of the small number of most able students made at least the expected level of progress in English, but a few did not make as much progress within mathematics. The most able made exceptional progress in modern foreign languages, and achieved highly. The academy's monitoring data, together with scrutiny of students' work, indicates that the most able are currently making strong progress across all key subjects.

- 'Catch-up' funding to support those who join the academy having not achieved at least a Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 national tests has been used effectively. This has enabled most eligible students to make accelerated progress, particularly within English.

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	139401
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	461199

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	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	430
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Squires
Principal	Martin Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01223 508742
Email address	admin@northcambridgeacademy.org

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