

Stockport Academy

Heathbank Road, Cheadle Heath, Stockport, Cheshire, SK3 0UP

Inspection dates 5–6 March 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well. They typically join the academy with well below average attainment. In 2014, the proportion who left with five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was just above average. This indicates good progress from their starting points.
- All groups of students, including the most able, those who are disabled or have special educational needs and those who are disadvantaged achieve equally well.
- Teachers have high expectations and aspirations for students. They also have good subject knowledge and use it to set work which is engaging and challenging. As a result, students enjoy their learning and are keen to do well.
- Teachers regularly check how well students are learning, and provide good support for those who are at risk of falling behind, so that all can make good progress.
- Students are unanimous in the view that they are completely safe in school. They have total confidence that they are well cared for and that if they ever need support they will receive it.
- Students' behaviour around the academy is impeccable. They treat each other and adults with real respect, and are courteous and helpful at all times. They have a genuine enjoyment of school, and this has resulted in rapidly improved attendance.
- Senior leaders and governors have a relentless drive and determination to ensure the best possible education for the students in their care. They have an accurate view of the academy's strengths and areas for development, and tackle identified weaknesses quickly and robustly. As a result, teaching, achievement and behaviour have all improved rapidly since the previous inspection.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress is not as rapid at Key Stage 3 as it is at Key Stage 4. There is still some variation in achievement across subjects.
- Marking does not always provide precise enough guidance about how students should improve their work, particularly for the least able. Assessment of students' work is not as accurate at Key Stage 3 as it is at Key Stage 4.
- Very occasionally, when teaching is not sufficiently challenging, students drift off task.
- The sixth form requires improvement because achievement is not good. There is variation in progress across subjects: students typically do better in vocational rather than academic subjects.
- Strategies to develop literacy and numeracy skills are in place, but are not monitored closely enough to check that they are having sufficient impact.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in parts of 34 lessons taught by 32 different teachers. Two of these lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors observed students' behaviour around the academy, as well as in lessons. They talked with students informally about their learning, as well as holding more formal meetings with groups of students of all abilities and from all three key stages.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the teaching staff and of the governing body. In addition, inspectors held a discussion with the representatives of the academy sponsor.
- The views of the 47 parents who responded to the on-line parental questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account, as well as information collected by the academy about the views of parents. In addition, inspectors scrutinised the 61 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspection team examined a range of documentation, including data about students' achievement from internal tracking systems and analysis provided by academy leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised leaders' monitoring records, including minutes of governing body meetings and information provided relating to attendance, safeguarding and behaviour.

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Christine Birchall, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Steven Baker | Additional Inspector |
| Fiona Burke-Jackson | Additional Inspector |
| Paul Rafferty | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- Stockport Academy is a smaller than average sized secondary school. It has a small but expanding Sixth Form. The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported by pupil premium funding is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is above average.
- The school is sponsored by the United Learning Trust.
- The academy does not make regular use of alternative provision.
- In 2014, the academy entered some students for GCSE examinations early, particularly in mathematics. This is not happening this year.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that achievement becomes outstanding, by:
 - ensuring that marking always provides students with very clear next steps about how to improve their work and that teachers give them time to act on the guidance
 - ensuring that work is always stimulating and well matched to the needs of the learners, particularly the least able, so that they are always engaged and enthused by their learning
 - ensuring the accuracy of assessment is as good at Key Stage 3 as it is at Key Stage 4.
- Take steps to accelerate achievement in the sixth form so that it is improving at the same rapid pace as in the rest of the school.
- Closely monitor the literacy and numeracy strategies to check that they are being successful in bringing about improvements in students' skills.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal is passionately committed to the academy and the community and is unrelentingly focused on ensuring that all students have the equal opportunity to reach their full potential. Very ably supported by the vice-principal and other senior leaders, he has succeeded in raising the aspirations of both staff and students and in creating an academy where students believe that they are valued and can succeed. As a result, teaching, achievement and behaviour have improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- The academy now has robust systems for checking how well students are learning. This has enabled leaders both to identify early those students who are at risk of underachievement and so provide them with additional support. It has also enabled leaders to hold all teachers to account for the achievement of students in their classes. Leaders have taken steps to ensure that teachers assess students' work accurately at Key Stage 4, however assessment is slightly over-generous at Key Stage 3.
- Over the last two years, the Principal has reorganised staffing to ensure that the correct leaders are in the right place to move the academy forward. Senior leaders have provided good training, support and challenge to ensure that middle leaders have the skills and confidence to drive improvements in their areas of responsibility. In turn, middle leaders are now repeating these processes with staff in their departments. Consequently, all staff have a clear understanding of the direction in which the academy is moving and of what they need to do to contribute. They are unreservedly supportive of the changes which have taken place.
- Teaching is well led. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching in a range of ways including learning walks, lesson observations, scrutiny of work in students' books and information about their achievement. Their judgements are accurate, and they use the information to provide targeted training for the whole staff and individual teachers. Performance management is used effectively to set challenging targets for teachers' improvement; leaders provide good support for staff to enable them to meet their targets but are prepared to challenge them if their performance does not meet the required standard.
- The curriculum has been revised over the last two years in order to enable students to achieve at a higher level. Literacy and numeracy skills had been identified as a barrier to students' learning, and so all students throughout Key Stage 3 receive additional time for literacy and numeracy lessons. However, there is some variation in quality, and the impact has yet to be fully assessed. Students receive very effective guidance when choosing which subjects to take at Key Stage 4, where there is a good blend of vocational and academic choices. The quality of information, advice and guidance for students is a strength of the school, using local agencies and employers where appropriate.
- The curriculum is supported by a wide range of enrichment opportunities, which include sports, arts, drama and dance as well as visits abroad. The academy makes good use of visitors to speak to students, including Greater Manchester Police, the ethnic diversity team, and the school chaplain. British values are well promoted and students are given ample opportunities to discuss healthy lifestyles, relationships and diversity. Equality of opportunity is fundamental to the way in which the school operates; leaders are rigorous in tackling discrimination in any form and in promoting good relationships across the academy. All this makes an outstanding contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders work very closely with parents to ensure that they are in a strong position to support their children's learning and well-being, and feedback from parents is very positive as a result. They are provided with guidance about supporting homework and preparation for examinations, and are included in all discussions about their offspring's future and option choices. In addition, parents are provided as appropriate with a range of information on wider social issues, such as alcohol and drug support.
- The sponsor has a secure understanding of the strengths and areas of the academy, and is confident that leaders have the capacity to continue to move it forward. Support is also provided across the Trust for addressing key issues, such as response to changes in relation to the curriculum and assessment.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have responded quickly and robustly to the issues from the previous inspection. They undertook a review of governance and used the findings to make changes to the way they worked, including recruiting new governors with specific skills and experiences.
 - In addition, governors have extended the range of steps which they take to find out first-hand how well the academy is performing. For example, not only are there now governors who have specific links to subjects, but they have also taken part in a quality assurance day when all governors visited school to talk to staff, students, observe behaviour in lessons and around school, and look at students' work in books. They have an impressive understanding of achievement and attainment data and are fully aware

of the quality of teaching in the school.

- As a result, governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and while being entirely supportive of the academy and the Principal, are in a strong position to ask challenging questions.
- The governing body checks that performance management is being used effectively to improve the quality of teaching, and ensures teachers who are not performing well enough do not receive pay increases. At the same time, governors know and support staff well, having taken part in a number of joint training exercises with them. Governors also know how the pupil premium funding is spent and take regular steps to check the impact. As a result of their challenge and the work of senior leaders, gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged students and others have closed.
- Governors have ensured that all statutory safeguarding requirements are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- The behaviour in corridors and around the academy is excellent. Students move calmly and purposefully, and are considerate and respectful, giving way to others as appropriate. Behaviour at lunchtime in the dining hall is impressive. Students are very mature, socialise well, and clear up after themselves, so that there is very little indication of litter anywhere around the building.
- Students are confident and happy. They are very welcoming to visitors, smile and greet people as they pass in the corridors and offer help if they think it might be needed. They all wear their uniforms smartly and correctly.
- Students are very proud of the academy. They say that they would recommend it to others and that there is little that needs to be done to improve it. Students feel valued by the staff, and are very appreciative of leaders' commitment to them. The older students all comment on the difference that the new Principal has made both to teaching and behaviour. They say it is really significant; comments such as 'I didn't like school before but I love it now' are typical.
- Behaviour records indicate that there has been an improvement in behaviour over time. Feedback from staff and parents also indicates that they view the behaviour of the students very positively.
- Behaviour overall is not yet outstanding because, although disruption to lessons is rare, when teaching does not engage them not all students consistently display positive attitudes to learning. There is evidence in books that in some lessons students do not always complete as much work as they could.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- The systems leaders have developed to ensure the safeguarding of students are extremely robust. Appropriate processes are in place for the safe recruitment of staff and staff have all had up-to-date training on child protection, including current and topical issues, such as protecting students against the risks of extremism and child sexual exploitation.
- Students all report that they feel very safe around school because of the efforts which teachers make to support them. They say that incidents of bullying are extremely rare and always dealt with quickly and effectively. They have an excellent understanding of the different forms which bullying may take and are aware of how to protect themselves from it, including cyber bullying.
- Leaders and teachers have worked extremely hard to promote a culture of tolerance, and students appreciate and value diversity as a result. They are all insistent that prejudice-based bullying, including homophobia and racism, have no place in their school.
- Staff are also acutely aware of the needs of students who may at times be vulnerable for a number of reasons, and they make every effort to identify and support them. Young carers for example are effectively supported to ensure that they are able to attend school regularly and achieve well.
- As a result of concerted focus by staff, attendance has increased and exclusions have reduced. This has ensured that the vast majority of students are, therefore, safely on site every day, and teachers check on the whereabouts of students when they are not in school. Systems for checking that students at alternative provision are safe are robust.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time is consistently good and students achieve well as a result. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of what students need to do to make progress. They ensure students understand what they are learning and what they need to do to be successful. They ask probing questions, which encourage students to explain and develop their thinking.
- Teachers plan lessons which engage and challenge students. They ensure there are a wide range of quality resources available, and a range of interesting activities, both individual and group, which keep students motivated.
- Teachers keep a close check in lessons on how well students are learning. They know who is likely to need help and provide one-to-one support for individuals in lessons to ensure that they make progress. Occasionally, tasks do not match the needs of all students closely enough, and this slows down the pace of the learning, particularly for the least able.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very positive across the academy. There are high expectations of students' behaviour in class. This ensures there is a good climate for learning, in which students are confident to ask questions or to ask for help.
- Where teaching has the greatest impact on achievement, teachers focus on ensuring that students have the opportunity to develop the higher level skills which will enable them to reach the top grades at GCSE.
- There has been an increased emphasis on literacy and numeracy this year, and teachers are planning for this in their teaching, although there is some variation in quality. All teachers check and correct spelling, but not all check that students can communicate clearly enough and express their ideas well both in writing and in discussion. Students are encouraged to read in lessons and enjoy doing so. A new reading programme has been introduced this year to support students whose reading skills are in need of development, but it is too early to measure impact.
- Numeracy is not as well developed as literacy. In mathematics lessons, students are not always provided with opportunities to use their knowledge to solve real-life problems, and there are not as many opportunities provided for students to use their numeracy skills across the curriculum as there are for literacy.
- Leaders have been investing in the development and training of teaching assistants so that they have the skills to support targeted students to make progress. There is evidence that, particularly in English and mathematics, teaching assistants are making a real difference to students' progress.
- Students' work is marked regularly and the majority of marking provides them with good feedback about what they are doing well. The quality of guidance about what students should do to improve their work is more variable; not all teachers provide them with clear enough next steps. Students do not always have the time to improve their work in response to the feedback they receive. Assessment of how well students are learning is not as accurate at Key Stage 3 as it is at Key Stage 4; teachers are sometimes over-generous.

The achievement of pupils is good

- When students join the academy in Year 7 their attainment is well below average. Teaching has improved rapidly and is now good. As a result, students make good progress and in 2014 they left with attainment which was slightly above average. Data for current Year 11 indicate that they are also on track to achieve well. However, progress is not yet as rapid at Key Stage 3 as it is at Key Stage 4.
- There is still some inconsistency in achievement across different subjects. Students do not, for example, achieve as well in technology or physical education as they do in other subjects. However, as a result of closer monitoring and support for teaching, progress in these subjects is beginning to improve.
- Progress in English from their different starting points is good. Students have opportunities to write for a range of purposes and to produce extended pieces of writing. However, most students do not read widely outside lessons, for example, although the 'hub' (library) has been redeveloped this year, the proportions of students in each year group who borrow books is low.
- From their different starting points, students make good progress in mathematics. Because of accurate teaching they develop a good understanding of mathematical concepts and processes. However, they do not always have sufficient opportunities to apply their knowledge to solve challenging problems related to real-life situations.
- The most able students make good progress and the proportions reaching the higher grades at GCSE are increasing. Across most subjects, they have secure knowledge of key facts and concepts, and they are

challenged to use this to analyse, evaluate and present arguments.

- The progress of disadvantaged students across the school is as good as that of other students. In addition, the gaps in attainment are closing. Currently, in English, disadvantaged students are typically attaining half a grade below non-disadvantaged students both nationally and in school. In mathematics, the difference is approximately a quarter of a grade. This is because teachers all know which students are supported by the pupil premium funding and it is used well to target students who are in need of support.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Teachers and teaching assistants are well trained in supporting their needs, and all students have appropriate education plans so that their progress can be monitored. The school uses Year 7 catch-up funding (additional funding provided for those students who start school with attainment below Level 4) to provide additional support for English and mathematics and to ensure students have the knowledge and skills they need to make progress further up the school.
- The students who attend alternative provision have access to an appropriate curriculum which is enabling them to reach their potential.

Sixth form provision

requires improvement

- The sixth form is small but increasing in numbers. Achievement requires improvement because it is variable across different subjects and students do not always make good progress from their starting points. Students make better progress in vocational subjects than they do in academic subjects, particularly in mathematics and history.
- Leadership requires improvement overall because it has not had time to make sufficient impact on accelerating students' achievement. However, there are a number of strengths. Strengths and areas for development have been correctly identified and appropriate plans for improvement are in place. Students now benefit from improved information, advice and guidance, which is ensuring that they are placed on the most appropriate courses in Year 12, and they have appropriate further education, higher education or careers advice to prepare them for leaving the academy. Leaders also work closely with a range of universities and this year a number of students have received offers of places from prestigious universities.
- Teaching is improving because of more directly-targeted support. Teachers have been provided with additional training to support their teaching to a higher level and action plans are in place where required. Students have access to a wide range of facilities to promote their independent study, which are open and supervised from 7:00 until 21:00. This is beginning to have an impact on accelerating achievement.
- Students are extremely positive about their experiences in the sixth form. They describe it as 'stressful but supportive' and say that they benefit from good counselling and support. There is a sixth form council and students believe that leaders actively listen to their views. They consider their teachers to be accessible and approachable, and say that they are all aware of their target grades and of what they need to do to improve. As with students in the rest of the academy, they recognise that there have been significant changes and improvements in the last two years.

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

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| Unique reference number | 135262 |
| Local authority | Stockport |
| Inspection number | 453495 |

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

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| 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 | 681 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 102 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | David Robinson |
| Headteacher | Frank McCarron |
| Date of previous school inspection | 6 March 2013 |
| Telephone number | 0161 286 0330 |
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