PROTECT INSPECTION

The Walsall Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133697
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	331635
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Dilip Kadodwala HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1045
Sixth form	212

Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sir Michael Wakeford
Headteacher	Mrs Jean Hickman
Date of previous school inspection	9–10 November 2005

School address	Lichfield Road Bloxwich Walsall West Midlands WS3 3LX
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Academy opened in September 2003. When it was last inspected in November 2005, there were students in all year groups except in Year 10. There is now an intake in all year groups. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. Around 15% of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly from Indian and Pakistani heritages. None of the students is at an early stage of speaking English. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average and the proportion who are eligible for free school meals is average. The school has had Specialist status in technology since September 2003 and in science and the performing arts since September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school **Grade: 1**

The academy's overall effectiveness is outstanding. It has a well-deserved reputation, a point reinforced by the great majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. One parent commented, 'Our son loves the school. He leaves the house with a smile and comes home with a smile.' Very many other parents expressed similar views. The academy is very successful in implementing its mission statement which seeks 'to raise educational standards through effective practice and sharing this with the wider community'. Students' achievement from their starting points to the end of Years 9 and 11 is good. GCSE standards are above average overall and rising significantly on all measures. In 2008, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades at A* to C was well above average from a position of being average in 2006. This cohort of students is one that the academy has looked after since it opened five years ago. However, the important benchmark measure of the percentage of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was no higher than average. Senior leaders recognise that this figure needs to rise and have set challenging targets for 2009.

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent because the academy's expectations of them are very clear and consistent. Students' behaviour is exemplary and they say that procedures for managing behaviour are firm but fair. Relationships between students from a wide range of social backgrounds and cultures are very good. They show respect for diversity, including cultural and religious diversity. Students greatly enjoy what is on offer at the academy because they are valued as individuals. Although a very small minority of parents expressed concerns about specific incidents, inspectors found that the care, guidance and support of students are outstanding. Students have a clear understanding of the factors contributing towards healthy living. They are helped to lead healthy lives through extensive physical education and effective life skills provision. Students' high sense of enjoyment is also closely linked to excellent curriculum and enrichment activities that are matched to their needs. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is excellent and makes a significant contribution to the development of students' skills and flexibility in learning, as well as enhancing students' enjoyment. The academy is also very effective in using its specialism in science to improve achievement across the curriculum. The use of the performing arts specialism is currently under further development. The sixth form is a very important aspect of the academy that has a very positive impact on the daily life of younger students. Students are excellent role models and, in important and subtle ways, their presence around the building helps to reinforce and promote the aims, values and ethos of the academy. Students' involvement in the school and local communities is impressive and makes a significant contribution to community cohesion. Staff make all the required checks to ensure the safety and protection of students.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Much has been done to improve the quality of teaching through rigorous monitoring and professional development opportunities. As a result, there are many good lessons and students also benefit from teaching when it is outstanding. However, there is not yet enough of this high quality teaching to ensure that all students make outstanding progress from their starting points. Much of the success of the academy is the result of the excellent

quality of leadership and management. Self-evaluation is rigorous and staff work hard to raise students' aspirations. The governing board members offer a very good balance of support and challenge that result in excellent governance. Progress on addressing the issues identified in the last inspection has been very good. Capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form **Grade:1**

The sixth form is outstanding. The numbers of students entering the sixth form are growing and standards are improving. This is most noticeable in Year 12 courses, where standards are now above national averages compared to broadly average standards in Year 13. Overall students make good progress from their various starting points. Significant strides have been made since the last inspection. Leadership and management are now outstanding. This is borne out in the clear long-term vision for the sixth form as an integral part of the wider remit of the academy. The close match of a broad range of subjects and experiences to students' individual ambitions and aptitudes reflects an outstanding curriculum. Teaching and learning are good overall and in some lessons, an imaginative mix of activities and well crafted opportunities for discussion lead to excellent learning and progress, inspiring and motivating students to go the extra mile and continue working in their own time. Students have excellent attitudes to work. Their independence and deeply held commitment to learning prepare them well for further and higher education and employment. The very good advice and guidance they receive, orally and in formal and regular assessments, provide the basis for continuing improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of students who attain five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that it accelerates students' achievement.

Achievement and standards **Grade: 2**

Achievement is good overall and standards are above average. In 2008, the proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades was much higher than the national average. The proportion of students attaining A* to C grades including English and mathematics has also increased to 49%, doubling the previous year's result and bringing this figure in line with the national average. There were some subject areas where standards were lower than expected. Senior leaders have identified the causes and put in place effective measures to tackle these shortcomings. Inspection evidence confirms that students' current progress is good. Pakistani and Indian heritage students' progress is outstanding. There are no significant variations in achievement between different groups of learners. This includes the achievement for those students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities because of the support they receive which ensures that they make more than the expected progress.

Personal development and well-being **Grade: 1**

The academy is highly effective in establishing a calm, purposeful but challenging working environment. The quality of relationships and the willingness of teachers and students to work cooperatively have been instrumental in securing improvement and in helping raise standards. The excellent behaviour and attitudes of students permeate the academy. Lessons are rarely disturbed and movement around the academy is orderly. This is particularly noteworthy, as time for breakfast and lunch is used efficiently as part of a very well organised rota. Students enjoy their lessons very much, their attendance is well above average and they think the academy's facilities are 'awesome'. These positive attitudes are an excellent indicator of how successful the academy is in preparing students for learning, ensuring their health and safety. Students say that bullying is not an issue and that there is very effective support should they need it. Students make an excellent contribution to the school and wider communities, for example through their sponsorship of charities which includes a global dimension. The academy is very successful in building the skills that support business and enterprise as students' progress through the school so that they are very well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with examples of outstanding practice. The academy's own monitoring records show that there is good practice in many areas of the curriculum, which was confirmed by the inspection team, as well as evidence of exemplary teaching and learning. Inspectors saw examples of outstanding practice where teachers had high expectations, brisk timing, a wide range of engaging activities and excellent relationships, allowing students to progress at a fast rate. For example, in a history lesson that was using a team-teaching approach with a large group of students, outstanding practice was evident. Students view this method of learning very positively because they enjoy these sessions and benefit from the wide range of teaching styles. The quality of teaching is not as effective when learning outcomes are not identified accurately enough, confusing student tasks with the identification of skills and knowledge to be learned. Occasionally, the planning of lessons does not take full account of the wide range of learners' needs and a lack of variety and challenge in activities prevents students from making faster progress. The best marking of students' work is very constructive so that they know what needs improving and how it can be done. There has been improvement in the modular reporting system since the last inspection, with comments more focused on the steps students need to take next in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides an excellent range of courses which meet students' needs. Most of them study a second language and ICT up to GCSE level or its equivalent. The targeting of support and resources for those students who have weak literacy skills makes a positive impact. The provision for

personal, social and health education makes a very significant contribution to students' personal development. Investment in specialist educational psychology, counselling and nursing support complements the work in the classroom. Students' future life is nurtured very well, supported by effective careers education and work experience. Students are actively encouraged to be responsible citizens and this is reflected in the care they show for their academy, as well as in their participation in community activities. Students also participate in high numbers in the optional third session of the day. They take up a wide range of opportunities that include sports, performing arts and clubs. A range of adventurous residential trips and excursions abroad enhance students' enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support **Grade: 1**

Robust risk assessments are carried out and the academy provides a healthy and safe working environment. There are very effective partnerships with other local agencies to ensure that students, including those at risk, receive the support they need. Students understand the importance of healthy lifestyle choices, taking part in regular physical exercise and eating healthily, although this is not always reflected in the food brought from home. Transition and induction arrangements for Year 7 students are very good and this enables them to settle quickly into school. Guidance for students when choosing options at the end of Key Stage 3 is also very good and the academy works well with other agencies to ensure that Year 11 students receive helpful information and guidance on post-16 opportunities, including the sixth form. There are very effective systems in place to track students' academic performance. Parents speak highly of the module reporting system which keeps them informed about their children's achievement.

Leadership and management **Grade: 1**

Senior leaders and the governing board members set high expectations. One result of this is that all students are valued equally. There is a very strong focus on maximising the life chances for each individual through very careful monitoring of their progress and the dismantling of barriers to their learning. The impact of this is reflected in the GCSE standards, which have improved significantly. Senior managers have full autonomy and responsibility for all aspects of their post and there is robust accountability. Self-evaluation is evident across all management levels, dealing successfully with the small number of identified weaknesses at subject leadership level. The nurturing of very strong partnerships with parents and the local community illustrates excellent community cohesion. The development plan identifies the right priorities for continuing improvement, based on wide consultations and very effective evaluation of the academy's provision. The plan identifies challenging targets for raising attainment and achievement which, if met, will demonstrate that the improving trend is continuing. The astute management of resources results in benefit for the students as well as for the local community. The academy provides excellent value for money.

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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**	**16–19**

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	**1**	**1**
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	**Yes**	**Yes**
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	**1**	**1**
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	**1**	**1**

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	**2**	**2**
The standards[1] reached by learners	**2**	**2**
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	**2**	**2**
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	**2**	

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	**1**	**1**
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	**1**	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	**1**	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	**1**	
How well learners enjoy their education	**1**	
The attendance of learners	**1**	
The behaviour of learners	**1**	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	**1**	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	**1**	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	**2**	**2**
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	**1**	**1**
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	**1**	**1**

[1] Grade 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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	**1**	**1**
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	**1**	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	**2**	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	**1**	**1**
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	**1**	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	**1**	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	**1**	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	**1**	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	**Yes**	**Yes**
Does this school require special measures?	**No**	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	**No**	

Annex B

23 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Walsall Academy, Walsall WS3 3LX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave my colleagues and me when we inspected your academy recently. We enjoyed greatly the opportunities we had to meet with some of you and to talk with you in lessons and in the superb dining area. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection.

The overall effectiveness of the academy, including the sixth form, is outstanding. Leaders and managers are doing an excellent job in bringing about improvement since the last inspection in November 2005. This has resulted, for example, in higher standards being attained by students who gained five or more GCSE passes in 2008. This represents good achievement and progress as well as the good quality of teaching. The staff value you highly as individuals, whatever your background, so that your personal development and well-being is excellent. Every effort is made to ensure that you have access to outstanding care and support so that any barriers to learning are removed. Your attendance is very good and we judged that your behaviour is excellent. Relationships between students who come from different backgrounds are great, as is the respect you show for religious and cultural diversity. The curriculum is outstanding because you can follow a wide range of courses that suit your needs and aspirations and you told us that the session three activities, and other opportunities, add to your sense of enjoyment. The use of technology across the academy is very impressive.

We saw some outstanding lessons and the school's own monitoring shows that these are evident across the subjects. We have asked senior leaders to make sure that the number of outstanding lessons increases so that your progress by the end of Year 11 is even better than now. We have also asked them to ensure that the percentage of five or more GCSE passes with English and mathematics included rises in the academy to be higher than the national average. Staff are determined to carry on improving and you can help by raising your ambitions and working with staff to make your achievement even better.

Best wishes for your future.

Yours faithfully

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector