Walsall Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133697
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	395312
Inspection dates	19–20 April 2012
Lead inspector	Robert Barbour HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy
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	1,097
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	279
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Charles Whittington
Headteacher	Vivienne Evans
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2009
School address	Lichfield Road Bloxwich Walsall WS3 3LX
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Introduction

Inspection team

Robert Barbour	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional Inspector
Nigel Pressnell	Additional Inspector
Paul Latham	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 30 lessons taught by 30 different teachers. Inspectors held meetings with students, staff and members of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the academy's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including academy plans, the academy's self-evaluation, behaviour records, safeguarding documents, questionnaires completed by staff and students and 223 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

Information about the school

Walsall Academy is a larger than the average-sized secondary school where the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is close to the average. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is low. The academy exceeds the current floor standards which are the minimum standards expected by the government. About 80% of students are of White-British heritage, and the other main ethnic groups represented are Indian and Pakistani.

The academy has the Artsmark and Sportsmark awards. It was awarded the Prince's Teaching Institute Mark for geography and the Rugby Football Union's Development Award. In 2010 the academy received the Most Improved Schools Award from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. The Academy is sponsored by the Mercers' Company of the City of London and Thomas Telford School and has been oversubscribed since its inception.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	**2**

Achievement of pupils	**2**
Quality of teaching	**2**
Behaviour and safety of pupils	**1**
Leadership and management	**1**

Key Findings

- This is a good academy. Standards are high and the progress that students make is increasing rapidly, driven by the outstanding leadership of the principal and her senior team. The behaviour of students is exemplary. The academy is not yet outstanding because although teaching in the academy is good, there is not enough that is consistently outstanding.

- The progress that students make is good and is improving rapidly. Students achieve results that are much higher than national averages. At the same time students develop outstandingly well a wide range of personal skills that are important for their wider development and employability.

- Teaching is overwhelmingly good, with some that is outstanding. The very best teaching uses the long teaching sessions, and large teaching spaces, most effectively to embed deep learning with active student participation. These teachers develop the skills of their students in speaking and writing very well. In some classes, however, although making good progress, students are passive learners for more of the lesson and less good use is made of the large teaching spaces and their speaking and writing skills are developed less effectively.

- The behaviour of students is exemplary and they enjoy learning at the academy. Their attendance is remarkably high and their punctuality is impressive. They feel very safe indeed in the academy.

- Leadership and management of the academy are outstanding at all levels. The progress that students make and the quality of teaching are monitored closely and rigorously. Highly effective action results from this monitoring so that both the quality of teaching and the progress of students are improving rapidly. The curriculum is outstanding, and the remarkably wide opportunities contribute to the outstanding promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- The sixth form is good. Results at A-level are improving rapidly and students are making good progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Share current outstanding practice to raise the quality of teaching consistently to that of the very best by
  - building the capacity of all teachers to model strategies for writing, reading and speaking across the curriculum
  - increasing the active participation of students in lessons especially in the use of the large teaching spaces.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Students enter the academy with attainment that is above average. They make good progress at the academy and their attainment is consistently above average and is continuing to improve. Students in the sixth form also make good progress, and their achievement is also on a marked and continuing upward trend. Disabled students and those with special educational needs also make good progress; their needs are analysed well and their support in lessons is of high quality. Some students start at the academy, however, with poor reading skills. In Year 7 they receive well-targeted additional support, and as a result one commented, 'I'm really happy coming to school now because my reading has improved and I use my brain more.' They refer positively to the help they have received to understand the representation of sounds, the extra reading practice and strong pastoral support. They all say that their confidence is improving as a result. These skills are fostered across the curriculum, sometimes outstandingly well, but less effectively in some classes. In general students' speaking and writing skills are above average; the lack of the development of these skills in all lessons is a constraint, however, on achievement being outstanding.

Students work hard in lessons. These are much longer than normally seen, typically three hours in length. As a result, students in many lessons learn more deeply than would be possible in shorter lessons, with opportunities for extended time to debate and to reflect, as when a Year 8 history class considered the effect of being a slave or a slave owner on a sugar plantation. Students in a Year 9 English class were lively and confident in expressing their opinions and they learned from each other in an extended debate. Year 13 students in a technology lesson were articulate as they discussed the design of iconic products. They collaborated well, made rapid progress and gave detailed consideration to the sustainability of designs and their impact on society and the environment. Parents' and carers' responses in the questionnaire overwhelmingly agree that their children are making good progress and inspection evidence supported this.

Quality of teaching

Teachers plan their lessons well and use a range of activities to develop students' learning in the extended three-hour lessons. They have good subject knowledge and assess students' work thoroughly with helpful comments. Most teachers also develop students' literacy skills well with attention to vocabulary and writing styles. In a Year 8 history lesson, the literacy skills of all students were developed well as the teacher stressed key vocabulary and writing styles. For students with special educational needs these skills were developing very well due to the high quality additional support students received from support assistants. The wide range of resources and learning styles used meant that the engagement of students was high. In all 70 students benefited from outstanding teaching in one of the large learning bases. In some classes, however, although literacy is fostered, teachers miss opportunities to develop the skills being used, such as the layout of a letter. Sometimes the large learning bases are not used so effectively, for example, when several teachers are engaged in direct teaching to large groups, concentrating on what is being said by the teacher or other students is more difficult.

In a Year 10 physical education lesson, the teacher made outstanding use of demonstration and explanation and prepared a lesson in which students worked together to develop their skills. The students made excellent progress, supported each other's progress and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Year 11 students described how they were making excellent progress in art as their teacher had given them extended and personalised assessment of their work with detailed advice on how to improve. In the sixth form, teaching is characterised by the teachers' secure subject knowledge, good teacher assessment of work and varied teaching styles.

The teaching of reading to students whose skills are not well-developed when they start at the academy is outstanding. It supports students in the recognition of sounds and letters, in additional reading practice and in a curriculum which makes specific provision for their needs. Parents and carers in their responses to the questionnaire overwhelmingly agreed that teaching is good at the academy.

Students gain an appreciation of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues that is at deep level. Students in Year 11 described how the teaching in geography had led them to understand environmental and international issues at a level where they appreciated the complexity in many contemporary concerns, such a global warming.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The academy is a thoroughly safe and mature environment in which students and their teachers form a remarkably harmonious community. The attendance of students is very high indeed and their punctuality is exemplary. Students work well together and are polite and well-behaved, both in and out of lessons. Their courtesy to each other and to visitors makes them excellent ambassadors for the academy. The use of exclusions is very low and continues to decline. Students have an excellent understanding of safety in all situations, such as on the internet. They state, and academy records concur, that instances of bullying of any sort are extremely rare and if any tensions do arise that teachers intervene rapidly to resolve issues.

The sixth form is a vibrant and tolerant environment, and sixth form students take an active role in mentoring younger students and leading sports activities. They take a full part in the tutor groups that contain students of all ages and they set an example of maturity and responsibility. Sixth form students respond to their high quality teaching with outstanding behaviour and enthusiasm.

Parents and carers responded very positively to the behaviour in the academy in their questionnaire responses. Some indicate that there is sometimes interruption to lessons, but academy records show this to be rare and inspectors noted the positive and skilful way in which teachers related to their classes.

Support provided for students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable is of the very highest quality. There are good links with parents and carers on welfare issues and very good links with external agencies. The particular strengths of the academy, such as in fostering literacy and character building through wide opportunities, are brought to bear in an impressive fashion to enable these students to gain in confidence.

Students are proud of their achievements. They respond with enthusiasm to the opportunities to work together at a deep level. They especially appreciate the wide opportunities provided by the longer school day. They are proud of the achievements of the student council in coordinating raising money for a variety of charities.

Leadership and management

The principal has successfully created an ethos in the academy for the highest expectations. Academy leaders have a clear grasp of the successes and development needs of the academy. All aspects of the academy's work are carefully monitored, and very secure systems are used to monitor the quality of teaching. There is an effective programme to ensure the professional development of staff. There is now teaching of very high quality in all faculties and inspection data shows that further rapid improvement in students' outcomes is continuing. Although academic outcomes are good they are rapidly improving and this is why leadership and management are outstanding rather than good. This proven track record demonstrates excellent capacity to improve.

The curriculum is outstanding. The academy day is much longer than that in most schools, and the additional time available is used for wider activities that ensure the development of the whole person, not merely academic success, including performing arts, music and sports. There is also a wide range of educational visits, both in this country and abroad. Students describe how the outward bound visits have widened their team and leadership skills. These activities support the outstanding spiritual, moral social and cultural development of students. This is also fostered within the academic curriculum and also by the strong ethos in the academy summarised as 'The Spirit of Walsall Academy' which forms a weekly focus to tutor groups and celebrates the range of opportunities that students take part in.

The governing body is highly effective in its role. Governors know the academy well, and undertake a variety of visits that hold the academy to account rigorously across

a wide range of areas. They are particularly effective in monitoring safeguarding, where all aspects are exemplary. They are effective in promoting equality and tackling discrimination: the academy is a highly accepting environment, there are few differences in progress between different groups of students and there is a strong emphasis on ensuring that all groups receive the best possible education.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	**Outstanding**	**Good**	**Satisfactory**	**Inadequate**
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

23 April 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Walsall Academy, Walsall, WS3 3LX

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection.

We judged the academy to be good, with good teaching, outstanding behaviour and safety and outstanding leadership and management. We were pleased to see how much you enjoy your academy, how proud you are of it and how strongly you believe that you are receiving a high quality education. We also noted your high standards of behaviour, high attendance and punctuality and the good progress that you are making at academy. You told us how safe you feel at the academy from bullying and how much you value the way teachers work so hard to ensure you make good progress. You told us how much you appreciate the wide opportunities you receive at the academy, including educational visits and outward bound expeditions.

We have recommended to the academy that teaching can be even better if all teaching matches the very best. We recommend especially that your skills in speaking, reading and writing should be actively fostered in all your lessons. You should also be engaged more actively in all your lessons, including those that take place in the learning bases.

You showed yourselves to be excellent ambassadors for the academy during our visit. The Principal and all the teachers are working hard and effectively to make sure that your education is as good as possible. You can play your part by continuing with your very high behaviour and attendance, by continuing to work hard and in the way you take such a full part in the life of the academy.

Yours sincerely

Robert Barbour
Her Majesty's Inspector

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