

The Open Academy

Salhouse Road, Norwich, NR7 9DL

Inspection dates 23–24 April 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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students learn in a caring, supportive environment where all are encouraged and helped to achieve their best. As a result, students have positive attitudes towards their learning, and achievement is improving.
- The Principal provides strong leadership. He has set higher targets for students and staff, and these have contributed to the improvements in teaching and achievement.
- The provision for students on the autistic spectrum attending the specialist resource base is outstanding.
- Students make good progress in relation to their well below-average starting points. They make particularly good progress in English.
- GCSE grades are improving. The gap between the academy and the national average is closing.
- Teachers mark work thoroughly and give students clear advice on how to improve their work. They ensure that students make the necessary corrections to their work, enabling them to make good progress.
- Teaching assistants are highly effective in supporting the learning and progress of students.
- The provision for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly strong. Their preparation for life in modern Britain is good.
- Students' behaviour around the academy is good. They show respect and courtesy to one another and adults.
- Behaviour in lessons is good and staff consistently apply the academy's code of conduct. Students feel safe in the academy.
- The governing body provides strong leadership. Governors have a good understanding of the work within the academy. They have been instrumental in bringing about the improvements in the academy.
- Students in the sixth form receive high levels of support with their studies and, as a result, all students who leave the sixth form gain the qualifications they need to go on to higher education, training or employment.
- The academy has strong links with the local business community. These are used to develop both the knowledge and personal skills students require for the world of work.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of students who gain five or more A* to C grades including mathematics and English remains below the national average.
- Teachers in some subjects do not set work that is hard enough to challenge the most-able students.
- A small minority of students do not take care over the presentation of their work. Inspectors saw examples of careless presentation in English and science.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 24 lessons to observe learning. Senior leaders joined inspectors for two of these observations. Inspectors also looked at work in students' books in lessons and conducted two work scrutinies to look at the quality of writing and the standards of presentation.
- Inspectors observed two reading support sessions.
- Inspectors visited two tutor periods.
- A range of documents were examined, including the academy's analysis of its own work and its improvement plan, information on students' academic progress, and documents relating to the quality of teaching, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors talked to six groups of students and held informal discussions with students at break and lunchtime.
- Discussions were held with the Principal, five members of the governing body, the Academies Executive Officer of the Academy Trust, senior leaders, heads of subject faculties and the head of sixth form. The lead inspector also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the 23 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the academy's own parental surveys and letters sent in by parents.
- The inspectors received and considered the views of the 39 staff that completed questionnaires.

Inspection team

Caroline Pardy, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Carol McCarthy	Additional Inspector
Godfrey Bancroft	Additional Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Since the last inspection, the academy has become part of the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust.
- Most students are White British.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free academy meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is just below the national average.
- The academy has special resource provision for ten students with special educational needs on the autistic spectrum. These students come from The Open Academy and other schools and academies in Norfolk.
- The academy works in partnership with Thorpe St Andrew High School, who offer additional sixth form courses.
- The academy offers alternative educational provision for a total of 20 students in Years 10, 11 and 12. These students attend the following provision for one day a week: the Anglian Academy of Hair, Easton College, Norfolk Training Services and Action Community Enterprises.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increasing the number of students who attain A* to C grades in English and mathematics by ensuring that all teachers set work that extends and challenges all groups of students, including the most able.

- Make sure that all students present their work as neatly as possible.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal provides strong leadership. His clear determination to raise standards within the academy through its core values of aspiration, leadership, teamwork, humility, courage, hard work, respect, service, integrity, forgiveness, thankfulness and perseverance has resulted in improving teaching, behaviour and improved achievement.
- Governors, senior leaders and teachers all share this vision. This has resulted in a learning environment where all are valued and supported so they can achieve. This was summed up by a group of students who told inspectors, 'There are no barriers for us, just challenges'. The academy wants us to achieve and to find out what we have to do to do this.' There is a clear commitment to equality of opportunity for all.
- The academy's evaluation of its performance is accurate. Senior leaders, subject and other middle leaders and the governors robustly monitor standards of teaching and students' achievement. Middle leaders are expected to regularly report their findings to senior leaders.
- Middle leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in their subject areas. Those leaders who have been in post for longer have had a sustained impact on improving student achievement. It is too soon to judge the impact that newly appointed staff are having on achievement.
- Senior leaders judge teaching using a range of information, including the impact of teaching on students' progress. This information is used to support individual teachers to improve their practice, enabling students to make good progress. All staff speak positively about the value of the training they receive. This robust monitoring is used to decide whether staff will receive a pay award; those that fail to meet their student progress targets are not rewarded.
- Students' progress is tracked and analysed thoroughly by both middle and senior leaders. Students who are falling behind with their studies or attendance are quickly identified and appropriate action is taken. The same procedures are used to monitor students' behaviour. This tracking is successful in improving behaviour, attendance and students' progress.
- The leadership of the resource base is excellent. Leaders liaise closely with parents and other support agencies to provide carefully tailored activities that not only allow students to make progress but also to integrate well with other groups of students. The vocational activities are particularly successful in preparing students for the future.
- Leaders target the use of pupil premium funding appropriately. It is used to provide reading support, homework clubs, progress mentors to support learning, alternative education placements and enrichment activities, such as curriculum trips and visits.
- The academy provides equal opportunity for all students. Students who are taught in the specialist resource base have access to mainstream lessons and they are represented on the student council group, Open Voice. Students who are vulnerable or facing emotional or social problems that are affecting their learning receive a high level of support. Intolerance of others, based on race, religion, beliefs or sexual orientation, is not accepted.
- The attendance and the progress of students attending college are carefully monitored. As a result, their attendance is good and current data shows that they make good progress on their courses.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It offers students a wide range of subjects. There have been changes to the Key Stage 4 and sixth form curriculum to allow students to study a wider range of academic subjects. The academy also continues to offer a number of vocational courses for students who would benefit from more practical-based subjects. Students have the opportunity to debate ethical issues through subjects such as religious studies, English, history and personal, health, social, citizenship and enterprise education.

- The academy offers a wide range of after-school activities; for example, performing arts, girls' and boys' football, Christian Union, street sports and remote control models. In order to widen students' cultural horizon, they are able to take part in a variety of trips and visits such as to the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, the Science Museum in London and the Netherlands. The academy has many links with schools abroad and has hosted staff and students from schools in France, Spain, Austria, China and Peru.
- Students are encouraged to take leadership roles within the academy, such as becoming a prefect. They also take part in many community activities, such as environmental projects and 'show racism the red card' event at Norwich City Football Club. Together with the curriculum, these leadership, social and cultural activities ensure that students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Students receive independent careers advice in Year 9 to support their option choices. They have further advice in Years 11, 12 and 13. The academy has established good links with local businesses. This is a particular strength as it enables the students to take part in activities that prepare them with the skills they need for work in later life. At the time of the inspection, a group of Year 10 girls attended a 'Women of the Future' conference. They told inspectors it was 'an amazing day' and it taught them to 'follow their dreams'. Almost all students who leave the academy at 16 go on to education or training.
- The academy works closely with the local authority. They are part of the Norfolk 'good to great' academy improvement programme. The local authority has supported them in reviewing their work, evaluating their performance and in providing nationally recognised training programmes for middle leaders. The academy works closely with other academies within the academy trust and with the London Borough of Bexley.
- Leaders and governors fulfil their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding and arrangements to keep students safe. Policies are reviewed regularly and are made available on the website.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very effective. Governors rigorously monitor the work within the academy by visiting lessons and by scrutinising progress, attendance and behaviour data. Governors meet with middle leaders at least three times a year to discuss standards of teaching, achievement and behaviour within their faculty. This enables them to ask searching questions on improvements made to teaching and learning in their subject areas. These meetings, along with the regular scrutiny of progress information, mean that governors have good knowledge of the quality of teaching and the progress being made by different groups of students.
 - Governors know how the academy performs in relation to other schools nationally. They use this information to make sure that teachers progress along the salary scale only if their teaching has resulted in them meeting their student progress targets. Governors take robust action where underperformance is identified.
 - The governing body manage the academy finances well. They ensure that the money used by leaders to support disadvantaged students is used effectively.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. There is a calm atmosphere around the academy as students walk purposefully to their lessons. They are courteous and respectful towards one another and adults, and they treat the building with respect. Most parents and almost all staff agree that behaviour within the academy is good.
- In the vast majority of lessons, students are well behaved and students told inspectors that behaviour in lessons has improved and teachers apply the code of behaviour consistently. Where the work in lessons is interesting and presents students with a challenge, they apply themselves especially well to their learning and remain focused.
- Students are proud of their work and, when looking through students' exercise books, inspectors noticed they completed a large amount of work each lesson. However, a small number of students do not take enough care with the presentation of their work. Inspectors particularly saw evidence of this when looking

through science and English books.

- The behaviour of students who attend the specialist resource base is outstanding. The students work well, both within the resource base and in mainstream lessons. They mix well with the other students at break and lunchtime.
- Students wear their uniform with pride and are smartly dressed. They are polite and helpful towards visitors.
- The proportion of students who are persistently absent from the academy has fallen as a result of the academy's very effective work with parents. Attendance has improved because students now enjoy coming to academy. It is now in line with other secondary schools nationally.
- Sixth form students set a good example to younger students with regard to behaviour. They have positive attitudes towards their learning and this is reflected in their high level of attendance.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Procedures for ensuring students' safety and well-being meet all current requirements. The overwhelming majority of staff and parents who responded to Parent View say that students are well looked after and safe in the academy.
- Students told inspectors that they feel safe in the academy because 'the teachers care about you'. They say that bullying of any type is rare and, if it should occur, staff deal with it quickly and fairly. Students know who to go to if incidents should occur and where to go to for support. They speak very highly of the chaplain and the support he provides.
- Thorough checks are undertaken to ensure that students attending the various colleges are safe and that they attend. Fortnightly meetings between academy staff and college staff are held to discuss students' attendance and behaviour, so these are closely monitored.
- The academy's personal, health, social, citizenship and what the academy terms its 'enterprise education programme' ensure that students are aware of the risks associated with social media and the internet. Students are also taught about other risks to their health and well-being.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection as a result of the uncompromising and relentless drive by leaders to ensure that teaching is at least good. The regular monitoring of the quality of learning within lessons means that good teaching is a feature across the academy.
- Teachers mark work frequently and thoroughly. Students are given clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work and further develop their understanding. Almost all teachers make sure that students make the necessary corrections to their work. Students told inspectors they found teachers' marking helped them make progress.
- Teaching within the specialist resource base meets the particular learning needs of the students exceptionally well. The teachers plan activities that appeal to the students and inspire them to learn. Every opportunity is taken to get students to talk and pose questions. Teaching assistants also provide excellent support as they have an in-depth knowledge of the learning needs of the students. Students are full of praise for the contribution that staff make to their learning and progress.
- Teaching assistants are highly effective in ensuring that students who require support are able to understand and complete the work set. They ask questions that guide students' thinking, enabling them to apply their knowledge to the given task.
- There is a positive climate for learning within the classrooms. This is because there is a good relationship

between staff and students. Teachers know their students and, as a result, they plan activities that are relevant and of interest to them. Teachers work to improve students' confidence as learners. Inspectors saw many examples where students were confident to answer questions and contribute their ideas and opinions in front of their classmates.

- Students are encouraged to read in class. In Key Stage 3, they have weekly reading lessons where students and staff read together for pleasure. These sessions are supporting the improvements in reading across the academy. Students get the opportunity to develop their writing and communication skills in a wide range of subjects. Inspectors saw examples of students using their extended writing skills in science. Teachers give students opportunities to use their mathematics skills across the curriculum but these are not as well developed.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use this to effectively question students and to plan activities that generally interest and are pitched at the right level for most students. However, there are occasions when teachers do not set work that stretches and challenges students of all abilities, including the most able.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the academy with attainment that is well below that found nationally. At the end of 2014, the proportion of students obtaining at least five A* to C grades including English and mathematics was the highest in the history of the academy, although it was still below the national average. This does not accurately represent the full improvement in attainment as a number of students took examinations in vocational subjects that were no longer accepted as part of the national performance tables.
- Progress is particularly good in English. The proportion of students making expected progress was above that found nationally and for more than expected progress it was close to average. Current data, based on rigorous assessment, indicates that this continues to improve.
- Progress in mathematics is not as rapid as in English. Although improving year on year, at the end of 2014, expected progress in mathematics was below that seen nationally. Academy data indicates that progress for the current Year 11 has improved considerably. The work in students' books and the progress they made in the lessons observed confirm that progress in mathematics is good.
- The gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and other students both nationally and in the academy has narrowed since the last inspection. In 2014, disadvantaged students on average gained just less than a whole grade below other students nationally in English and half a grade below their classmates. In mathematics, the attainment gap was one and a third grade below other students nationally and three quarters of a grade below their classmates. Leaders have made changes to the additional support that students receive and this is now having an impact on the achievement of disadvantaged students. The current gap in both mathematics and English between disadvantaged students and others within the academy is currently half a GCSE grade. The gap is also narrowing in Key Stage 3.
- Achievement in a range of other subjects is improving. Inspectors saw evidence of this in lessons and when looking at students' work. Progress information provided by the academy indicates that achievement in a range of other subjects is also improving; for example, in science, geography, history and Spanish.
- The academy estimates that the current Year 11 students are on track to achieve considerably better results in the summer of 2015. This judgement is based on students' performance in mock examinations, tests throughout the year and moderated coursework. Students who are falling behind have received targeted support through extra revision programmes. Inspectors looked at students' examination results, coursework and the work in students' books to verify the academy's data.
- Students who attend the specialist resource base make exceptional progress in both their academic and personal development. They acquire the basic skills of literacy and numeracy exceptionally well, especially

so in the light of the challenges and barriers to learning posed by their disability. The work of the base prepares them outstandingly well for the next stage of their education and for adult life.

- The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator makes sure that students who are disabled or have a special educational need receive targeted support. As a result, they are now making similar or better progress to other students within the academy, especially in Key Stage 3.
- The academy has a very small proportion of most-able students. Teachers do not always set work that is particularly challenging for these students and, as a result, they make expected rather than more than expected progress in most subjects. Current assessment data shows that progress for most-able students is now improving.
- 'Catch up funding' used to support those students who join the academy below the nationally expected level in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests is used appropriately. It is especially effective in supporting students to improve their reading.
- In 2014, the academy entered a number of students early for GCSE mathematics. This supported students who were less confident taking examinations and a number of these students improved their grade. However, results indicate that a number of most-able students did not achieve the highest grades. The academy is not entering students early for examination this year.
- Students studying vocational qualifications at alternative educational placements make progress in line with their peers. They are all expected to gain a GCSE grade in English, mathematics and science, and they appreciate the extra mathematics and English lessons they are given. All students move on to study their chosen courses when they leave the academy.
- In previous years, some students have been accepted onto A-level courses without gaining at least a grade B at GCSE in the subjects they are studying. As a result, the proportion of students achieving higher grades at A level is below that nationally. Current assessment data, based on students' performance in examinations, indicates an improvement in 2015. Work seen in lessons confirmed that students are making good progress. The academy now ensures that students have appropriate grades for the courses they are studying. The academy's current assessment information indicates an improvement in attainment is expected in 2015.
- Most students choose to study one- or two-year vocational courses in the sixth form. These students all pass their courses and progress to either further and higher education or employment. This is also true of those students studying A levels.

The sixth form provision

is good

- 'OA 6', the sixth form, accepts students of all abilities and provides a range of courses that suit those wishing to follow vocational or academic courses. In the past, this has been largely vocational courses with a few academic courses. Sixth form leaders have responded to the need to provide more academic A levels and there is now a wider range for students to choose from. Students can mix vocational and academic Level 3 courses. Students who wish to study specialist pathways in business, pre-law and creativity have the option of studying additional A levels through the academy's partnership with other high schools.
- Students make strong progress in vocational courses and this continues to improve. All students who start a vocational course complete it. Those students who study hair dressing jointly with the Anglian Academy of Hair have real salon experience. As a result, all progress to employment at the end of the course. The partnership with Wroxham Football Club provides students with the opportunity to train with the club while completing their Level 3 BTEC extended certificate.
- The proportion of students progressing from Year 12 into Year 13 in 2014 was low. This is because most of the students were studying a one-year course. A small number of students did not complete their studies because they moved into apprenticeships in the subjects they were studying.

- Teaching in the sixth form has improved since the last inspection. The academy's monitoring information indicates that the progress of current students has improved on that of students in 2014. This reflects the positive impact teaching is having over time.
- The academy makes good provision for students who need to re-take their GCSE in mathematics and English. The current attainment of these students shows an improvement on previous years.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and they use questions well to deepen students' understanding and knowledge of a subject. Feedback given to students is very precise and detailed. However, teachers do not always provide work that sufficiently challenges the most-able students.
- Teachers have a good knowledge of the examination requirements and use this to increase students' understanding of what they need to do to successfully answer questions.
- Students receive good-quality impartial careers advice and support in applying for university, training or employment. They speak very highly about the level of support they receive from teachers and refer to their teachers as being dedicated.
- The head of sixth form has brought about improvements in teaching and curriculum provision which have resulted in the improved standards.
- Leaders have developed the notion of service within the sixth form. All students contribute to a community within the academy, such as working as a teaching assistant or listening to younger students read. Within the local community, they work closely with charities such as Cancer Research, organising events, and the gardening club with Age UK. Students remark on how these activities have developed their self-confidence as well as prepared them for life outside the academy.

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	135650
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	462056

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	610
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fred Corbett
Principal	Jon Platten
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 June 2013
Telephone number	01603 481640
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