

Staffordshire University Academy

Marston Road, Hednesford, Cannock, Staffordshire WS12 4JH

Inspection dates

25–26 April 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Standards of achievement are too low at this school. In particular, disadvantaged pupils are not doing as well as they should in key stages 3 and 4.
- Leaders have not used pupil premium funding well enough to boost the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
- The curriculum lacks breadth. Very few pupils have been able to follow courses in geography, history and languages. Pupils have been required to follow courses that add little value to their future employability.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is weak. They have relied heavily on over-generous external advice.
- Leaders and governors do not have a clear understanding of pupils' progress or the school's effectiveness.
- Teaching is inadequate. Teachers do not use assessment well enough. Too many pupils do not know how well they are doing or how to improve their learning.
- Teachers' expectations of what lower-ability disadvantaged pupils can achieve are too low. Many lessons are poorly planned and pupils lose interest.
- In some lessons, poor behaviour slows pupils' learning.
- Attendance is low for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There have been some improvements, but these are slow and inconsistent.
- The sixth form requires improvement. A-level grades have not been high enough over time. Examination results for vocational courses have been broadly in line with national averages.

The school has the following strengths

- Careers education is a strength of the school. The proportion of pupils going on to education, employment or training has risen.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. There are many activities and trips for pupils to take part in. Pupils appreciate these opportunities and are eager to take part.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors have a good understanding of safeguarding and ensure that it has a high profile in the planning and operation of the school.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for pupils, especially lower-ability disadvantaged pupils in key stages 3 and 4, by:
 - ensuring that whole-school planning is sharply focused on effective strategies for improving the learning and progress of all pupils
 - ensuring that staff have a clear understanding of what pupils can achieve and an accurate understanding of pupils' starting points
 - addressing, as a matter of urgency, the underachievement of lower-ability pupils in both key stages 3 and 4 so that there is no repeat of the poor examination results at GCSE and A level.
- Improve quality of teaching in key stages 3 and 4 by ensuring that:
 - teachers have well-informed expectations of all pupils and do not settle for poorly presented, incomplete or superficial work in their books
 - pupils of all abilities know what they need to do to improve their work and make progress
 - learning is appropriately challenging and that slow progress and low standards of work from disadvantaged pupils are not accepted.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving the attendance of all vulnerable pupils so they do not miss learning time
 - ensuring that behaviour in lessons is good
 - improving the ways in which all pupils show respect for each other and their teachers.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - developing relationships with external partners and agencies that provide objective and accurate evaluations of standards in the school
 - improving staff training and professional development
 - ensuring that all middle leaders have a clear understanding of how pupils make progress from their different starting points
 - ensuring that all leaders have a clear understanding of assessment
 - ensuring that governors have an accurate understanding of the school's performance so they can take urgent and effective action to remedy weaknesses
 - making sure the curriculum is fit for purpose and offers pupils appropriate courses

that add value to their learning including in humanities, languages and creative subjects

- making sure that leaders review the impact of their choices for courses that whole year groups are required to take, to ensure that these courses help pupils in future education, employment or training.
- Improve the effectiveness of 16 to 19 programmes of study by:
 - making sure that all students following A-level courses achieve grades that reflect their abilities
 - improving the teaching of A-level courses so that academic rigour is more consistent and the highest grades are achieved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Staffordshire University Academy formed a multi-academy trust in July 2014. Following this, a new headteacher and governing body took responsibility for leadership at the academy. Leaders have not been successful in sustaining or developing an ambitious culture. Too many pupils achieved poor examination results in 2015 and 2016.
- The school met the government's minimum floor standards in 2016. However, significant groups of pupils did not get good enough grades. Lower-ability pupils and lower-ability and middle-ability disadvantaged pupils underachieved significantly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.
- For pupils currently at the school, their progress is still poor in English, mathematics and science. Leaders have an over-optimistic view of current pupils' progress, especially progress being made by disadvantaged pupils in core subjects. Leaders have been over-reliant on middle leaders, who have an insecure understanding of whether pupils are making progress in the core subjects at key stages 3 and 4.
- Too much of the school's use of assessment is not properly informed by a clear vision of how pupils make progress from their starting points. So, for example, lower-ability disadvantaged pupils have not made progress over time or currently.
- In 2016, very few pupils took a GCSE in language. Leaders had designed the curriculum so poorly that languages had not been offered to pupils in this year group.
- Similarly, in humanities, too few pupils were offered the chance to study geography and history. The headteacher has made commendable efforts to offer the current Year 11 a chance to study humanities subjects that they could not begin in Year 10. Leaders are supporting these pupils. However, they will have to ensure that considerable resources are focused on these pupils if they are to fulfil their potential in the time available.
- Leaders are not evaluating the impact of decisions in relation to course choices. For example, almost all pupils in key stage 4 are following a course although leaders cannot point to any clear objective evidence that it is helping pupils' employability. All pupils in Year 10 are currently studying the course, taking an hour a week for 39 weeks of the school year.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning is hindered by the lack of a broad creative curriculum. There is almost no drama or music taught at the school on a regular basis in key stages 3 or 4. Pupils have little opportunity to learn ways of responding to their understanding of the world around them in creative or imaginative ways. There are exceptions to this. For example, some of the most able pupils write skilfully in imaginative forms.
- Leaders' use of some significant funds has been unsuccessful. For example, the use of the pupil premium has not resulted in lower-ability disadvantaged pupils making sufficient progress in core subjects.
- Subject leadership is not effective and in some core subjects it is fragile. Leaders of subjects do not have a clear understanding of how to track pupils' progress and

therefore identify if pupils are achieving better than before or who needs additional support. Some subject leadership is more effective. The leader for humanities, for example, has a secure understanding of how pupils make progress from starting points in key stages 3 and 4.

- The multi-academy trust leadership has been ineffective in preventing the poor examination results of disadvantaged and lower-ability pupils in core subjects. These leaders have not sought rigorous external advice. They have, instead, too readily accepted inflated evaluations of their work from partners that have not accurately identified where significant improvements are needed.
- The proportion of pupils going on to education, employment and training has risen and is broadly equivalent to the national figure. Despite not achieving well in 2015 and 2016, careers information, education and guidance have helped pupils to manage the impact of these poor GCSE results on their future options.
- British values are taught through tutorial programmes and what the school calls 'Global Values'. The effectiveness of this aspect of the curriculum is not strong. Many pupils said that these lessons lacked purpose. Other pupils could describe the importance of a citizen's contribution to democracy and the importance of respect for others.
- Leaders have expanded extra-curricular provision. Leaders say that staffing has been a problem in creative subjects so that they cannot offer drama or music as separate subjects in Year 10.
- Leaders have used funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that their GCSE grades have been in line with all pupils nationally. In the workbooks of current pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, however, there was evidence of weak progress over time. This is particularly the case in key stage 3 English and mathematics.
- Leaders report that they are using the catch-up funding effectively. These funds are intended to support those pupils who come into the school with low scores from their primary schools. However, inspectors saw workbooks from lower-ability pupils in key stage 3 where there was very little difference in pupils' basic literacy over time.
- Inspectors recommend that newly qualified teachers are not appointed to the school.

Governance of the school

- Governors have not been well enough informed about the weaknesses in the school. They have not ensured that their self-evaluation is sufficiently rigorous. In their evaluation of the weaknesses in disadvantaged pupils' progress, for example, there is an over-emphasis on marginal improvements that have been recalculated to show the most optimistic possible interpretation. This masks the extent of deficiencies.
- Governors do not have an accurate understanding of current pupils' progress. The reports from external partners have described a much better quality of work than actually exists. There is no mention, for example, of the extent of underachievement inspectors found in English in key stage 3. Inspectors also viewed a significant number of workbooks where pupils had made very little progress over time in science in key stage 4 or in mathematics in key stage 3. None of this is taken into account in any of the school's self-evaluation.

- Governors have a well-established system for managing teachers' performance, which takes account of pupils' outcomes. However, since the information about pupils' progress is not always accurate, this system is flawed.
- The moral commitment of the governing body to school improvement is beyond doubt. The governing body are committed to the success of pupils and staff at the school. They are eager to describe what they have done and how they check what they do. However, to date, they have not been successful.
- Governors have formed partnerships with consultants and others to moderate and standardise the school's work. However, too much of the resulting feedback is unhelpful. For example, in a document commissioned by the school to comment on pupils' attendance, persistent absence was not mentioned at all for any pupil group. This left the school with an incomplete picture and delayed the urgency with which persistent absence must be tackled.

Safeguarding

- The school has a positive safeguarding culture. Leaders have implemented effective policies to help the school keep pupils safe. As a result of clear guidance, staff know how to spot pupils at potential risk and how to report incidents of concern. Pupils are well looked after and parents are suitably informed about safety matters.
- Leaders follow clear and well-informed procedures to recruit safely. All staff who recruit new employees to the school receive rigorous and up-to-date training.
- Governors are knowledgeable about safeguarding. Governors come into school regularly to check aspects of the school's safeguarding procedures. Pupils are kept safe because governors ensure that safeguarding is central to the school's daily operation.
- Pupils say they feel safe and that they apply what they learn in lessons to use electronic technology appropriately. Pupils say they know who to talk to if they have a problem and that any bullying is dealt with quickly.
- The school works with the local authority closely to keep pupils safe, and the school believes it gets good support from colleagues on the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teaching lacks the challenge necessary for pupils to achieve their potential. In too many lessons, learning is slow or disrupted by poor behaviour. For many pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, progress is not good.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not well matched to pupils' abilities, especially for lower-ability pupils. As a result, examination results for lower-ability disadvantaged pupils and middle-ability pupils in 2015 and 2016 were low.
- Much learning does not engage pupils, so they do not put much effort into their work and make little progress. The lack of breadth in the school's curriculum has not helped pupils' engagement.
- In key stage 3, English and mathematics basic skills are not well taught. This means

that by the time pupils get to the older year groups, they are not well prepared for their examinations. This is especially the case for pupils who have the greatest barriers to learning – the lower-ability and lower-ability disadvantaged.

- Assessment is not efficient so pupils and staff do not have an accurate understanding of progress. Too many pupils cannot describe for themselves how to take the next step in their learning and many do not have an accurate idea of their own capabilities. Instead, pupils underachieve because they have low expectations of themselves, compounded by low expectations from staff.
- Many workbooks have pages torn out, there is graffiti on pages intended for learning and work is missing or incomplete. However, there are exceptions to this. In Year 11 English, for instance, pupils complete extended writing, comparison and analysis work and creative writing to a high standard. This is in stark contrast with learning in many middle-ability and lower-ability pupils' workbooks, where there are frequent errors in basic punctuation, grammar and spelling.
- In some lessons, pupils are motivated and self-disciplined. Inspectors saw an example of this in a modern language lesson, where pupils' positive attitudes contributed well to their progress in pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. All too frequently, however, there is calling out and restless behaviour in lessons and this has a negative impact on pupils' learning.
- The most able pupils have made better progress over time and in the work seen during the inspection. These pupils have positive attitudes to schoolwork and respond politely and courteously in their lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- There are numerous instances, especially in key stage 3, where pupils' self-confidence is too low. They do not contribute well to lessons. There is low-level disruption which also hinders progress. Lower-ability pupils do not understand how to be successful learners.
- Pupils explained that they understand how to keep themselves and others safe. Leaders ensure that there are programmes of study delivered on British values and on the dangers of extremism. The school's management of pupils' well-being is effective in some lessons but in lessons where behaviour is poor, pupils' well-being is not secured.
- At break and lunchtimes pupils behave towards one another with tolerance and respect. In corridors and other social spaces, pupils are polite to one another and adults. They open doors for others, wear their uniform smartly and drop very little litter. The most troubling behaviour seen by inspectors was in a range of lessons. Pupils confirmed that disruption in lessons slowed down their learning.
- Leaders offer careers education to pupils throughout the school. This gives pupils an understanding of the purpose of learning. Inspectors spoke to pupils who said they knew what they wanted to do when they left Year 11. There are still too many pupils,

especially lower-ability pupils, who are not ambitious for themselves.

- The school has been successful in bringing down the previously high number of exclusions. There has been a marked improvement in the use of exclusion as a means of sanctioning poor behaviour. The school does not shy away from using exclusion in the most exceptional cases to keep pupils safe.
- Pupils feel safe from bullying. They say that when bullying occurs, it is managed quickly and effectively. In Parent View responses and staff questionnaires, respondents broadly agreed that bullying was not a widespread or significant problem.
- Pupils say they feel safe and feel they benefit from the teaching they are offered in using electronic technology, looking after each other and their environment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Behaviour in some lessons is unacceptable. Pupils were heard using homophobic language; some sat with their feet on desks, others were calling out and ignoring their teachers. In a few lessons, objects were thrown across the room during lessons. Pupils' learning was significantly hampered in these lessons. Pupils reported that poor behaviour was an issue in some classes particularly in key stage 3.
- Too many pupils' workbooks do not show evidence of pride. In key stage 3, lower-ability pupils do not have enough confidence in their work. They do not take sufficient care to get basic presentation and handwriting to a high standard. Progress is limited in these books because there are too many uncorrected errors in spelling and punctuation.
- In a minority of other lessons, especially those for the most able, behaviour was impeccable. Pupils were polite, thoughtful, hardworking and diligent in these lessons and their progress was enhanced.
- The proportion of pupils absent persistently is too high among pupils supported by the pupil premium and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There have been improvements overall, but these are slight and not marked enough.
- The school has put considerable resources into supporting pupils' attendance, but improvements are too slow. Leaders have not focused sufficiently on persistent absence or the poor attendance of particular groups of pupils. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those entitled to free school meals remains below the national average.
- Pupils behave well in the alternative provision used by leaders to improve some pupils' employability.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Over time, significant groups of pupils, particularly lower-ability disadvantaged pupils, have not made good progress given their starting points on entry to the school.
- In GCSE English in 2016, there was marked underachievement by disadvantaged

lower-ability and lower-ability pupils overall. The employability of lower-ability disadvantaged pupils is weak because their grades at GCSE English, mathematics and science are not high enough.

- GCSE results in mathematics were low in 2015 and 2016. Overall, pupils did not get the grades they should have done. This was especially marked for disadvantaged middle- and lower-ability pupils.
- Leaders have not offered a broad range of science qualifications to pupils and outcomes over time in science have not been good. Again, lower-ability pupils did not do well enough in GCSE science.
- Results in the 2016 English Baccalaureate were very poor. Leaders have not given pupils the chance to succeed in this because they have not offered enough geography, history, science, languages, drama or music to pupils.
- Lower- and middle-ability disadvantaged pupils achieved poorly in 2015 and 2016 test results. Leaders have not used the pupil premium funding well for these pupils. However, the most able disadvantaged pupils achieved examination grades broadly in line with the national average.
- For pupils currently at the school, there are wide differences between lower-ability disadvantaged and lower-ability non-disadvantaged pupils' progress. The school's tracking information, however, suggests the gaps are much narrower. Inspectors could not see convincing evidence of this in pupils' learning or in their work books. There are too many errors, for example, in key stage 3 literacy. This was especially evident in the books of lower- and middle-ability disadvantaged pupils.
- Examination results for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were broadly in line with all pupils nationally. The progress of these students in current cohorts is hampered by weaknesses in basic English and mathematics. It is also less strong because too many pupils with statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans are absent too frequently.
- Information about the most able pupils shows improvements and, in 2016, their progress rates did not cause concern. However, many of the most able pupils are not able to take a sufficiently broad range of subjects because of poor curriculum arrangements.
- Pupils in alternative provision are making good progress while they are at the settings used by the school. Inspectors found that pupils had good attitudes to work and were achieving well in English and mathematics.
- Some pupils report how much they enjoy reading and evidently enjoy reading aloud. This is very inconsistent. Some of the most able in key stage 3 say they read independently. Inspectors found that a significant number of pupils of all ability groups said they did not read for pleasure nor did they enjoy reading.
- In key stage 3 humanities, there are real strengths. Inspectors saw key stage 3 geography learning and workbooks where pupils were fully engaged in their lessons and showing good understanding of geographical concepts in their written work.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- A-level learning is better this year than last year in all subjects. Vocational learning is as effective as last year when it was in line with national averages.
- Students achieved nationally average grades in their vocational qualifications in 2016 and in 2015. For current cohorts, although small in number, students are achieving well in their vocational studies in Years 12 and 13.
- A-level qualification grades were lower than the national average in 2016 and in 2015. Students in current cohorts in Years 12 and 13 are achieving better grades than last year.
- Work experience and work-related learning is offered to all students. They speak highly of the provision, as they do about most aspects of the programme of study.
- Leaders are improving the effectiveness of assessment. Consequently, some learning is challenging and stretches the most able students. Leaders are using professional development to ensure that all staff teaching A levels use assessment, questioning and challenge to help all students make the progress that they should.
- Students resitting their GCSEs in English and mathematics did not do well last year. However, this year, although few in number, some have already achieved their grade C whereas in Year 11 they had achieved lower grades.
- Most pupils who start Year 12 continue into Year 13, and the proportion of students going on to higher education, employment or training is in line with national figures.
- Leaders are aware of the improvements needed in academic A-level qualifications. Leaders have taken steps to ensure efficiency of teaching by combining Year 12 and Year 13 classes because the numbers are so small. Inspectors saw learning that matched students' abilities and was challenging. Students respond positively to their studies, behave and attend well and have positive attitudes.
- Careers education is provided independently to all students, which results in most pupils progressing to secure destinations after Year 13.
- Leaders have provided a safe learning culture in the sixth form. Students' welfare is well managed. Students understand how to stay safe.

School details

Unique reference number	137164
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10032614

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

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	600
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	40
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Roger Williams
Headteacher	Rowena Hillier
Telephone number	01543 224700
Website	www.suacademy.co.uk/
Email address	principal@suacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 March 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The proportion of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is much lower than the national average, as is the proportion of pupils for whom their first language is not or

believed not to be English.

- The proportion of pupils in receipt of special educational needs support or who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is higher than the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets out the minimum expectations for pupils progress across a number of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Inspection reports for this school in 2013 and 2015 both gave overall effectiveness judgements of requires improvement.
- The school converted to a multi-academy trust in 2014.
- The school has managed very significant budget deficits over the past three years.
- The school uses three providers of alternative provision: Chaselea Pupil Referral Unit, Cannock College and Peak Pursuit Education Ltd.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 40 lessons through key stages 3, 4 and 5. An inspector conducted a visit to one of the school's alternative providers.
- Inspectors conducted a joint work scrutiny with members of the middle leadership team in the presence of the headteacher.
- Inspectors held a range of meetings with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team and middle leadership staff.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body and the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors met with pupils and discussed with them their learning and workbooks.
- Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of employment checks on staff, met with the designated safeguarding lead and scrutinised a range of records of recruitment, welfare plans and actions taken to keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation the school produces as part of its self-evaluation and development planning, policies and documents published on the website and other documents made available during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at responses from Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were very few responses to Parent View and no responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Graham Tyrer, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Bathyal	Ofsted Inspector
Adele Mills	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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