

Aston Manor Academy

Phillips Street, Aston, Birmingham, B6 4PZ

Inspection dates 26–27 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- All groups of students make good progress in a range of subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4 and some are making outstanding gains from their starting points in Year 7.
- The headteacher is an inspiring leader who has the very highest expectations of what students can achieve. All staff share her ambitious vision for the academy and wider community.
- Teaching is good and an increasing proportion is outstanding. Teachers are confident and skilled, and enjoy excellent relationships with students.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary, both in lessons and around the academy. They have very positive attitudes to learning and show great pride in the academy.
- Academy leaders at all levels are relentless in their ambition to improve the life chances of students. There is a determined and successful drive to improve teaching that challenges and supports teachers extremely well.
- Leaders set very high targets for students and teachers to achieve. They check the progress of students rigorously and drive up the quality of teaching by making sure all teachers have first-class training and coaching.
- Academy governors have a very clear view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. They carefully check progress of planned actions and support the academy to eliminate weak teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is some variability in the quality of teaching and, occasionally, the work set is not carefully matched to students' abilities.
- The relatively new sixth form requires improvement. Historically, not enough students have made good and outstanding progress in some sixth form courses but the academy has made changes to teaching and leadership which means it is improving strongly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 45 lessons, of which 12 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of short visits to lessons as part of themed learning walks.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and school staff, including middle and senior leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the 17 responses to Parent View.
- The inspectors observed the work of the academy and looked at a number of documents, including minutes of governors' meetings, the managing of staff performance, records relating to attendance, behaviour and checks on the quality of teaching and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Simon Blackburn, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Pankaj Patel	Additional Inspector
Neil Gillespie	Additional Inspector
Annabel Bolt	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average secondary school.
- Almost all students are from minority ethnic groups and about a third of students are believed to speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is below average but the proportion supported through school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- The school uses a range of alternative off-site provision to support its students, the main provision being St Georges Inclusion Centre.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Aston Manor Academy converted to become an academy school on 1 September 2011. When its predecessor school, Aston Manor School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The academy is part of a Multi-Academy Trust with Chillwell Croft Primary School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding lessons taught and so improve students' achievement across the whole academy, and particularly in the sixth form, by:
 - ensuring that the tasks that teachers give to students always match their ability so that students make rapid progress from the start of each lesson
 - making sure that all teachers use the whole-school marking guidelines to not only give students accurate feedback but also to challenge them with corrections and more demanding work which is then checked later
 - increasing the number of lessons that inspire and enthuse students with their imaginative and innovative learning activities and approaches.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement in Key Stages 3 and 4 has risen sharply over recent years. In 2012, students taking GCSE examinations had made much better progress in English and mathematics and in a range of other subjects than students nationally.
- In 2012, the proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, decreased to below the national average from above average in 2011 because results in English were not as strong. However, given that when students arrive at the school in Year 7 they are working at standards that are about a year behind other students nationally, this still represents very good progress.
- Almost all groups of students make progress that is better than other students nationally. This is as a result of extremely high expectations of what the students can achieve. These are reinforced all the time by the headteacher and all the teachers in the school. The academy sets challenging targets for all students. It checks their progress regularly and successfully steps in to help those students who begin to fall behind.
- The school carefully tracks the progress of all ethnic groups to ensure that they get an equal chance of success. This tracking shows that all minority ethnic groups make progress at rates that are similar to, or better than, groups nationally. Those students who speak English as an additional language make progress that is similar to other students in the academy.
- Academy leaders recognise that the policy of entering students early for GCSE English has put a limit on the grade they can achieve and this accounts for the relatively few A* and A grades achieved in 2012. Early entry was used so that students could then take another qualification and enjoy a wider range of subjects but this policy has been reviewed and changes made. Early entry to GCSE Examinations in other subjects has a positive impact on student achievement.
- Students supported by the pupil premium are making outstanding progress and the academy's own progress-tracking data, evidence from lessons and work seen in students' books show that gaps in performance between eligible students and others in the academy are now closing and have been smaller than in most schools for the last two years.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those who are at risk of not doing well due to emotional or behavioural problems, make very good progress. This is due to the additional support provided by a highly trained and expert team of staff. They draw on detailed planning and they are well managed and work very well with teachers.
- The academy works with a partnership of other local schools to provide alternative provision for students whose behavioural or emotional problems put them at risk of exclusion. This provision, at St George's Inclusion Centre is well managed and the students make good progress. Students who attend St George's in Year 11 gain good GCSE results.
- In 2012, progress made by students in the sixth form was in line with national averages although those students taking vocational subjects did much better than those taking AS and A level courses. Students currently on courses in the sixth form are making much better progress across almost all subjects as a result of targeted training for teachers and better advice and guidance for students.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is usually good and an increasing proportion is outstanding because the academy's expectations are high and underperformance is not accepted. There are very positive relationships between teachers and students that ensure that lessons usually proceed at a brisk pace with good levels of enjoyment.
- The teaching of literacy is a key priority for the academy because students start school with reading and writing skills that are well below those of students nationally. Teachers' planning places an emphasis on helping students to use and understand subject-specific language and vocabulary, and teachers take every opportunity to develop students' skills.
- Where teaching was judged to be outstanding, the common feature was the teacher's enthusiasm for their subject and a desire to engage and interest the students in order to promote good-quality learning and a keenness to find out more. This was seen in an outstanding religious education lesson, where the teacher used highly emotive questions and got the students to reflect on their own ideas and perceptions through a wide range of learning activities that rapidly developed their analytical skills. This aspect was sometimes missing in lessons that were not judged to be outstanding.
- Teachers use questioning skilfully to deepen students' understanding. They ask probing questions and students respond well, expressing themselves confidently and clearly. Teachers use information and communication technology well to motivate students and develop skills. In a physical education lesson, a tablet computer was used to video students' volleyball technique so that they could then review and assess each other's skills.
- The academy provides teachers with a wide range of information about students' ability levels and, in most lessons, this is used well to make sure that students are challenged to learn new and difficult things. In some lessons, teachers talk for too long and do not then target the most difficult work to the most able students. This means that these students do not make as much progress as they could.
- Teachers' marking is generally good and some examples of outstanding practice were seen where students' work was given very constructive feedback with clear things for the student to do to improve their work and move to the next level. Appropriate action was then taken by the student; sometimes making corrections, sometimes tackling a more difficult question; and then the teacher reviewed the improvements and gave more feedback. This dialogue resulted in accelerated progress and improved skill levels. This quality of dialogue in assessment and feedback was not seen in every subject.
- The teaching of A and AS level lacked the required challenge when the academy first introduced the sixth form because teachers found it difficult to provide enough variety of activity in long lessons. Leaders and managers have introduced well-targeted training to bring the quality of teaching in these courses up to the level that is found in the vocational courses. Teaching in the sixth form is now improving strongly as a result of this training for teachers. Students appreciate the extra attention that the smaller class sizes allow and think that the work they are given is challenging and interesting.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour around the academy and in lessons is outstanding. Students are courteous, polite and friendly to staff, visitors and to one another. Their attitudes to learning are highly positive. They enjoy working together and continue to behave well even when the teaching is less good.
- Students feel safe at the academy. They were keen to tell inspectors that the site is secure, that they have adults they can talk to about any problems and that they never feel threatened. Parents and carers agree that their children feel safe.
- The academy makes an outstanding contribution to helping its students stay safe. It serves an area where gang-related violence has been a problem and it takes a very proactive role in challenging unsafe practices inside and outside school. Although exclusion rates were high at the predecessor school, the academy's 'zero tolerance' strategy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour has seen fixed-term exclusions reduce to below the national average.
- Students and parents agree that bullying is rare and, when it occurs, is dealt with very well. Students have good awareness of the hazards of cyber-bullying and all forms of discriminatory bullying, including homophobic and racial bullying, and know how to maintain their own and others' safety.
- The academy uses a highly effective system to reward good behaviour and good work, and to challenge poor behaviour. The students fully understand and respect this. Staff use the system consistently and, as a result, minor incidents of poor behaviour have declined year-on-year.
- Attendance has improved and is above average. Together with the excellent presentation of students' work and the punctuality seen during the inspection, this confirms that the students enjoy being at the academy and have a real pride in their work.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and senior team lead the academy outstandingly well. They have very high expectations of teachers and students, and the life chances of students passing through the academy have improved as a result.
 - The academy's senior and middle leaders are highly effective in their roles and help ensure that the achievement of students is at least good and increasingly outstanding. The academy analyses information about the progress of different groups of students and uses this very effectively to direct resources to ensure that any gaps in attainment are narrowed.
 - The quality of teaching is checked regularly by leaders at all levels and teachers are helped to improve their teaching through carefully planned training programmes and coaching. As a result, an increasing proportion of lessons are outstanding and students' rates of progress have increased.
 - The academy's formal process for managing the performance of staff, which sets teachers pay, is very well structured and provides clear and challenging targets for teachers to meet. Teachers are held to account for their students' progress and attainment, and excellent performance is recognised through salary and career progression opportunities.
 - The school offers a broad and balanced range of courses at Key Stages 3 and 4 that is flexible enough to interest students and enhance their skills. Special arrangements are made for those
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students who need to develop particular skills or who fall behind due to illness. For example, English language support assistants help those students who arrive at the school at the early stages of learning English so they can make progress across a range of subjects. Many enrichment activities support subject learning and foster spiritual, moral and social development which is a particular strength of the school.

- The range of subjects on offer in the sixth form is wide and is now better matched to the abilities and interests of its students. The academy uses informal partnerships with local schools and colleges to broaden this offer further. The academy's leaders recognise that performance of students in the sixth form was the weakest area of the school in 2012. They made changes to the leadership of the sixth form and made sixth form teaching a priority in all their improvement planning. As a result, teaching in the sixth form is improving rapidly.
 - Displays around the school challenge racism and homophobia and this is followed up in lessons and assemblies. Two assemblies seen during the inspection were outstanding in the way they encouraged students to reflect on important issues, and showed the emphasis placed by the school in tackling discrimination and promoting good relations.
 - The academy uses pupil premium funding very well, as shown by the outstanding progress made by students eligible for the extra funding. The school spends it in actions that will have the biggest impact on progress. For example, some funding was used to employ additional specialist mathematics and English teachers to reduce the class sizes in these subjects and give students more targeted help.
 - Academy leaders have an incisive and accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and, particularly, where teaching needs to be improved. They make plans which are well directed and resourced, and check that actions are having the impact that was intended.
 - Procedures for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body makes a very effective contribution to the academy's strategic vision for the future. It holds the headteacher and senior leaders robustly to account for all aspects of the academy's performance. Governors receive regular reports from the headteacher and other senior leaders but are increasingly seeking out first-hand evidence to ensure that planned actions are being carried out appropriately. Governors know how well the school is doing because they understand the progress data that the school uses and the minutes of meetings show that governors ask challenging questions when performance in a particular area or for a group of students is below that which was expected, as was the case last year with the sixth form. Governors are clear on where teaching is good and they support the headteacher in ensuring that weaker teaching is eliminated through the performance management process. The governing body has a useful range of skills that they employ to the benefit of students and they maintain their governance skills through regular training. They manage the academy's budget very well, including pupil premium funding, and have, with the headteacher, ensured that the academy has the resources to continue to improve teaching and learning.
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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	136882
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	400222

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Community
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	873
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ray Linforth
Headteacher	Heather Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0121 359 8108
Fax number	0121 380 5648
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