

Arrow Vale RSA Academy

Green Sward Lane, Matchborough West, Redditch, B98 0EN

Inspection dates 30 April–1 May 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students of all abilities make outstanding progress. They enjoy their learning and are confident that they can reach the challenging targets that are set for them.
- Students say how much they value the high quality teaching they receive and their teachers' willingness to give them extra help and encouragement to prepare them for their examinations.
- Teachers plan tasks very well so that students of all abilities, including the least and most able, are able to achieve success and enjoy their learning.
- Behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Relationships between teachers and their students are warm and supportive and students work and collaborate very well together.
- The academy's strong focus on ensuring that students are safe and well cared for is outstanding. Students facing challenging circumstances are extremely well supported.
- The atmosphere around the academy is calm and orderly. Students and staff greet each other with genuine warmth and all students feel well known as individuals. They are polite and courteous, wearing their uniform with pride.
- The sixth form is good and rapidly improving. Students are now making good progress because they are well prepared for their advanced studies through the provision of appropriate courses in the main academy. This was not previously the case. Teaching and leadership of the sixth form are good and beginning to have an impact on raising achievement.
- The inspirational principal, very well supported by his senior team, governors and the academy sponsors, has established a climate where students succeed and grow in confidence. All share his vision and high expectations.
- The strong focus, throughout all the academy's work, on the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, enables students to develop leadership skills and teamwork and fosters their creativity.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 31 lessons, three of which were seen together with senior leaders. They also made a number of further short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with students, parents, governors, a representative from the academy sponsor and staff, including subject leaders.
- The inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at policies, self-evaluation and development planning, monitoring records, information about students’ progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students’ work.
- The views of the 84 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 50 responses to the staff questionnaire were considered by the inspection team.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Alan Brewer

Additional Inspector

Jack Kenny

Additional Inspector

Surmeya Bhikhu

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Arrow Vale converted to become an academy in September 2012.
- The academy works closely with other academies sponsored by the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) particularly Whitley Academy, Coventry.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average, while the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is high.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is below the national average as is the proportion speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for some students including those in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is above average.
- The academy meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Eight students follow a variety of part-time off-site work-related alternative courses provided by 'Wheels' and 'The Forge.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable students to make the maximum use of the 'mission' advice in the written feedback on their work, by providing sufficient time in lessons for them to act upon it, and consistently making sure that they use it to improve their work.
- Fully embed the recent curriculum development, sustain the provision of high quality teaching, to raise the effectiveness of the sixth form to match that of the main school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students typically enter the academy in Year 9 with well below average levels in the basic skills of reading, writing, communication and mathematics. The proportion of higher attaining students in each year group is well below average.
- In 2013, by the end of Year 11, the proportion of students gaining 5 good GCSE passes including English and mathematics was above average. Assessments show that this is expected to rise further by the end of 2014.
- Students express confidence that the academy will help them to reach their challenging targets. They were keen to tell inspectors how much they are encouraged and supported, teachers communicating the belief that they will do well. Almost all students are now making expected progress in English and mathematics, with the majority making better than expected progress. There is no significant difference between the rates of progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds or the very few who speak English as an additional language.
- There is a strong focus on the promotion of literacy skills across all subjects, where students are frequently encouraged to read out loud or to write descriptions of practical activities, such as those observed in an art lesson. Particularly effective is the reading session at the start of every Year 9 English lesson, fostering a love of reading and providing opportunities for students to share their enjoyment with others. The light and airy library is very well used.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make exceptional progress as a result of the outstanding teaching and support that they receive. The 'Base' provides a safe haven where students facing challenging circumstances, who need extra help with their learning, receive the individual support they need.
- Despite the low proportion of higher attaining students on entry to the academy, an increasing number are now predicted to achieve the highest grades by the end of the year. This is particularly the case in business studies and French where predicted grade A or A* passes have dramatically risen as a result of the academy's focus on enabling all to achieve their potential. Students know their targets and are constantly encouraged to strive for the highest grade.
- All students are now entered for GCSE mathematics in their final year in order to make the most of teaching time. Progress in mathematics, which in 2013 was less rapid than that in English, has also improved dramatically over the past year as a result of improved teaching in the department. Year 11 students told inspectors how much they enjoy the subject.
- Students for whom the pupil premium provides additional funding make significantly better progress and attain well above this group nationally in both English and mathematics. Although, in 2013 they were almost half a grade behind their peers in English and almost a grade behind in mathematics, the academy's current assessments show that this gap is closing rapidly as is the rate of expected progress for this group in English and mathematics across all year groups.
- The progress of students following alternative off-site courses is frequently checked and the academy ensures that these students also achieve well. The proportion of students who leave the academy not in education, employment or training is very low.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Students have historically joined the sixth form with below average attainment as a result of following a curriculum of work-related courses that did

not always prepare them sufficiently for the rigour of advanced level study. Standards in Year 13 are therefore just below average. The academy has addressed this and, as a result, standards are rapidly rising, particularly in Year 12. All students are expected to be successful at A and AS level in 2014, with almost a third gaining the highest grades. All students who failed to gain a Grade C pass in English or mathematics have successfully re-sat these examinations.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The rapid progress made by students of all abilities and in all year groups, shows that the quality of teaching is outstanding. During the inspection a high degree of consistent practice was observed and a large proportion of outstanding teaching, including in classes taught by newly qualified teachers.
- Teachers know their students very well and ensure that they plan tasks that are well matched to their students' individual needs. There is a clear focus on providing the challenge that will stretch those of highest ability. For example, in a French listening lesson observed, the teacher was very careful to ensure that those entered for the higher tier were appropriately challenged, while at the same time building the confidence of those entered for the lower tier.
- There is a high level of student engagement with all able to make a contribution because plenty of opportunity is provided for students to discuss their learning with others.
- Achievement assistants are used very well to provide high quality support to students who need extra help, including those at an early stage of learning English. These additional adults in lessons are closely involved in the planning for the students they support, working in close partnership with teachers.
- Students are required to think carefully, challenged to justify their response by skilful questioning. For example in a Year 9 English lesson, the teacher provided students time to think before answering and then asked other students to add to the response given, enabling them to develop the ability to discuss their ideas with each other.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and is now beginning to have an impact on raising standards for students which, earlier in their school careers, were low. Students are challenged to take responsibility for their own progress, setting themselves targets and evaluating their progress towards them. For example, in an art lesson observed, students were guided to set themselves small bite-sized targets for each lesson and for their work at home, enabling them to concentrate on the small details that will enable their success.
- Marking across all subjects is of a consistently high quality. Teachers award a 'medal' recognising what has been well done, and set a 'mission' for students to develop their work further. However, teachers do not consistently check that students follow up the advice given.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding because students consistently show pleasure and commitment to their learning across all year groups. They cooperate well with other students in lessons and help each other. Parents and staff strongly agree that students behave well.
- Students are very positive about behaviour and can explain how effectively the staff foster good attitudes. Older students told inspectors how much behaviour has improved since they started at the academy and that lessons are now rarely disrupted. They show understanding and

acceptance of the students who have behavioural difficulties and say how well the academy manages them so that their learning is not disrupted.

- Exclusions are below average due to a range of interventions to manage any negative behaviour effectively. The internal exclusion room is now largely redundant.
- Behaviour around the academy is calm and orderly. Litter is rare and students' artwork and sculpture displays are never touched or damaged. Inspectors were most impressed by the warmth of students' relationships with adults and the maturity they show.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. All students say they feel safe and well cared-for. All parents report that they are confident their children are safe at the academy. Parents of disabled students and those with special educational needs expressed how grateful they are for the support they and their children receive.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and students say that there is always someone they can go to if they are unhappy. Students told inspectors of the academy's intolerance of racist language in any form. The academy's work to prevent homophobia is exceptional.
- The care and support of students and their families facing challenging circumstances is exemplary and includes partnerships with external agencies. This includes support for good attendance and, as a result, persistent absence has fallen. Attendance rates are above average and students are consistently punctual to lessons.
- Students enjoy contributing to the academy community, taking responsible roles and developing leadership skills, for example acting as sports leaders.
- The behaviour of sixth form students is also outstanding and their attendance rates are high. They contribute well to academy life, for example, through the school council and the junior leadership award.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The inspirational principal knows every student as an individual and holds all his staff accountable for the progress and well-being of each one. He is very well supported by his senior and wider leadership team, by the governing body and by the academy sponsors, all communicating the same vision for providing the very best opportunities for the young people of Redditch.
- The school's view of its effectiveness is detailed and thorough and appropriate priorities identified for improvement that focus closely on raising the aspirations of all groups of students.
- Leaders' drive to improve and sustain high quality teaching is relentless. Checks are extremely thorough. Training programmes range from three-day intensive courses for all, to regular 'show and tell' sessions in staff briefings, all staff having to explain how they are supporting individual students to ensure they reach their targets. Newly qualified teachers told inspectors how well supported they are enabling them to improve their practice.
- Subject and other leaders likewise told inspectors how much they value the support of their line-managers and the training that enables them to develop as leaders. This means they can take a full role in ensuring that teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility are of high quality.

- The courses that students follow are well balanced and tailored to meet their individual needs. This includes intensive support for those who enter the academy with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills and individually planned support for learning in the 'Base'. 'Ebacc' and work-related courses are provided and the highest achieving students are able to follow courses that challenge them appropriately and prepare them for advanced study.
- A key focus throughout the academy is the provision of opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The partnership with the RSA has enabled a wide variety of unique enrichment opportunities, including working with professional designers, that inspires creativity. The 'discovery enrichment programme' provides further opportunities for teamwork and the development of leadership skills, preparing students very well for their future careers.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good. Leaders track progress and the quality of teaching closely and are able to spot underachievement early and put in appropriate support. Students told inspectors, 'You can't get away with anything! Staff are very supportive and helpful'. Any student experiencing difficulties is mentored by a member of the senior leadership team ensuring that they are individually encouraged and supported. A bursary scheme provides financial support for those students previously eligible for pupil premium funding, enabling them to be fully included.
- The 16-19 study programme is well established. There is a good range of academic courses as well as work-related courses and a wide variety of creative courses. The core curriculum supports students' development well by including finance in preparation for university study. Students receive appropriate careers advice and support and the large majority of students have gained places at university or in apprenticeships.
- The academy engages fully with parents and responds quickly to concerns. Frequent communications, including by text message, make sure that parents are kept fully aware of their child's education and are able to access any support that they need.
- The academy sponsors have taken a full and active role in providing support for the academy and its leaders, including the secondment of a vice principal and the close partnership with another academy in the RSA family. This support, together with the strong leadership of the principal has enabled the dramatic improvement in all aspects of the academy's work since its involvement. RSA Fellows provide expertise and links with local business to enhance learning.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are very well informed and use their wide range of skills and expertise to challenge and support the academy. This includes a strong focus on safeguarding and the care of looked-after and other vulnerable students. They have ensured that safeguarding procedures and practice are exemplary. The governing body is well led and organised so that every aspect of the academy's work is scrutinised. Governors are keen to undertake additional training in order to further develop their effectiveness. They have first-hand knowledge about the quality of teaching and have ensured that the effective management of teachers' performance leads appropriately to salary progression. They are rigorous in ensuring that the pupil premium funding is having an impact on raising the achievement and well-being of this group of students.

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	138505
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	426897

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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	608
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	158
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ruth Crockett
Principal	Guy Shears
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01527 526800
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