

The Polesworth School

Dordon Road, Dordon, Tamworth, B78 1QT

Inspection dates 11–12 March 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- All groups of students achieve very well. Standards are above average and students make rapid progress as a result of the consistently high quality teaching that they receive.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and their attitudes to learning are exemplary. They are excited by their learning and very keen to do well and to contribute their ideas.
- Behaviour around the large school site is impeccable, creating a calm atmosphere. Adults lead by example, often greeting students by name. Relationships are warm and supportive, enhanced by mixed-age tutor groups where older students support younger ones.
- Students say that the academy keeps them very safe. They have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including e-safety.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers have extremely high expectations of their students. They have excellent knowledge, both of their subject and of the way students will be assessed. This inspires students to constantly strive to reach the highest level they can.
- A very small minority of teachers are so focused on providing a high level of challenge that they do not always provide a sufficient variety of support for students of different abilities.
- The quality of marking is exemplary and this has a significant impact on students' fast progress across subjects. A constant dialogue between teacher and student can be seen in students' books as they readily respond to the advice they are given on how to improve.
- Leaders and governors have been relentless in ensuring that the school sustains its high quality provision. The executive headteacher and the head of school, very well supported by their senior team and by governors, have communicated their passion for ensuring that all reach their potential and have an equal chance to succeed.
- Procedures to ensure high quality teaching are extremely robust and leaders' very high expectations ensure that all are held to account for students' progress and wellbeing.
- Strong partnerships exist with the primary schools within the academy trust, which ensures a seamless transition between key stages.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students value the support and guidance provided. Standards are rising as a result of students' strong motivation and high quality teaching that challenges and inspires them.
- Students' outstanding spiritual, moral social and cultural development has been enhanced by the strong international links that have been well established. They are very well prepared for their role as citizens of modern Britain.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in 48 lessons across all year groups in a variety of subjects. Twelve lessons were jointly observed with a member of the academy's senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body, staff, and the executive headteacher of Birchwood Primary School who works in close partnership with the academy, within the multi-academy trust.
- The inspectors observed the academy's work and looked at policies and the academy's own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors examined records of lesson observations, information about students' progress, minutes of meetings of the governing body, safeguarding documents and samples of students' work.
- The views of the 69 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, in addition to the academy's own survey of parents' and carers' views. Inspectors also considered individual communications from parents as well as the 116 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Mary Davis, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Joanne Benjamin-Lewis | Additional Inspector |
| Andrea Quigley | Additional Inspector |
| Jeremy Seymour | Additional Inspector |
| Jacqueline Pentlow | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- The Polesworth School converted to become an academy on 1 February 2011. When its predecessor school, Polesworth High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The academy is one of the founding schools of the Community Academies Trust, formed in 2012. The executive headteacher at The Polesworth School is also the Chief Executive Officer of the Trust and leads it with the executive headteacher of Birchwood Primary School.
- The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds. Very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- Twenty-nine students follow part-time off-site work-based courses, provided by South Staffordshire College.
- All students are entered for GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 11. The school does not use early entry for public examinations.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Share the outstanding practice existing in the academy to ensure that all teachers consistently set tasks that provide the right level of challenge to match the full ability range of their students, so that none find the work too easy or too difficult.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The executive headteacher and head of school communicate their passion for ensuring that all students should succeed in being the best they can be. Together with their strong team of senior leaders, and well supported by the governing body, they have made sure that the academy has sustained and improved on the high quality of all aspects of its provision. Their extremely high expectations of both students and teachers have resulted in an academy where all have the chance to succeed.
- The academy is a harmonious and caring community. Despite its size, students are well known as individuals and are greeted by name by adults who lead by example, resulting in evident warmth and mutual respect between teachers and students. Teachers work as a close team, sharing leaders' vision of continually improving students' achievement and wellbeing.
- Procedures for checking on the quality of teaching and holding all to account for students' progress are extremely robust. Subject leaders take a full part in this process and are in turn held to account for the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility. Any teachers identified as experiencing difficulties are placed on an intensive programme of support to ensure they quickly improve their practice. Teachers across the academy share good practice and training is closely matched to teachers' individual needs as well as the academy's priorities. Much of this training is delivered by teachers identified through the monitoring process as having a particular skill that can be shared with others.
- Subject leaders are well supported by their line managers and receive appropriate training to enable to fully carry out their leadership roles. They are encouraged and supported very well in their professional development, for example through taking further professional qualifications. They successfully drive improvement within their subject area and hold teachers fully to account for the progress made by their students.
- The tracking of students' progress across the academy is very effective, ensuring that all groups achieve well and that there is no discrimination. This tracking process enables leaders to identify any student who is falling behind and to check on the impact of the additional support that is provided. A close check is kept on the progress of all disadvantaged students in the school so that leaders at all levels have a high level of awareness of this group of students and of ensuring their success.
- Additional funding is well used. Year 7 'catch-up' funding ensures intensive support for those who enter the academy with low basic skills in literacy and numeracy. This has resulted in the rapid progress of many students. Additional funding provided through the pupil premium is also used effectively and the gap between this group and others in the school is closing rapidly across the school. In some areas, disadvantaged students make better progress than their peers.
- The broad curriculum is very well matched to students' needs and interests and is flexible to include extra subjects requested by students. This includes courses in astronomy and Chinese or the study of classical civilisations. Students told inspectors that they value the free choice of subjects they have, so are not tied to a specific pathway. This enables gifted linguists, for example, to study more than one language. The academy's leaders ensure that students of all abilities have an equal opportunity to study a full range of academic subjects. Work-based courses, including in construction and hair and beauty are provided off-site at South Staffordshire College. Leaders carefully check their progress, behaviour and attendance and ensure that they are safe. Students also value the exciting variety of enrichment activities and trips that are provided, for example the school show and foreign exchanges.
- Students speak highly of the careers guidance they receive and the individual advice about which options will enable them to follow their chosen career path. Careers fairs and information evenings are very well attended by students and their parents.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Leaders, aware

that the large majority of the academy population is White British, have established strong international links, including with schools in Ghana and Jhaipur in India. Sixth form students who have taken part in exchange visits to these countries speak of their 'life-changing experiences'. Students of all ages have the opportunity to discuss together the issues that face the modern world in their tutor sessions. These are often led by sixth form students and include a focus on democracy and rights and responsibilities. This prepares them very well for life in modern Britain.

- The academy takes great care of its students. Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements. Students facing challenging circumstances are very well cared for with comprehensive support provided for them and for their families.
- Strong links have been established with other academies within the trust and particularly with the headteacher of the closest neighbouring primary school, whose executive headteacher works in close partnership with the academy's leaders. Together they are working to provide a seamless education. This has included establishing a common assessment policy across these schools and others within the Trust. Transition between primary and secondary phases is extremely strong as a result of many opportunities for staff and students to visit and work at each other's schools.
- Leadership of the sixth form is strong. Students' progress and the quality of teaching are carefully checked and students value the advice, support and guidance they receive preparing them well for the next stage in their education or employment.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors use their range of expertise and experience well to check on all aspects of the academy's work. They are well informed about data relating to the academy's performance and how it compares to schools nationally. They value the training they have received which has enabled them to have a good understanding of any areas where students are falling behind. They also value the clear information that is provided by the senior leadership team about all aspects of the academy's work. This enables them to provide a balance of challenge and support for senior leaders.
 - Governors are fully involved in the life of the school. They make regular visits and know about the quality of teaching and the progress that students are making. They ensure that performance management procedures are effective and that teachers' salary progression is linked to the achievement of students. They ensure good teaching is rewarded and tackle underperformance effectively. They carefully monitor the impact of additional funding on the progress and well-being of disadvantaged students.
 - Governors ensure that they access training and are constantly seeking to improve their practice. They focus strongly on ensuring that safeguarding procedures are followed and that staff and students are kept safe.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Students show a great enthusiasm for their learning, being quick to volunteer answers or to take a leading role. Even when undertaking exciting activities, they are very quick to calm down and listen to their teachers' instructions. During the inspection, students were often observed engrossed in their learning or closely collaborating with each other in small groups.
- The large school site is calm and students move sensibly from one area to another. They greet staff cheerfully as they go. Students present themselves well. They show pride in their school and there is no litter or graffiti. Students attend well in the main school and in the sixth form and are punctual to lessons.
- Mixed-age tutor groups enable a family atmosphere to be created within a large school, so that all feel well supported and students of all ages get on well together. Sixth form students act as good role models for younger ones and provide both leadership and support.
- Students of all ages enjoy taking responsible roles such as representing their peers on the school

council. They contribute their opinions on the quality of teaching through the 'Student Voice' and say that the academy's leaders listen to their opinions.

- The attendance of students who attend off-site provision is closely monitored and they are driven to and from the college. The health and safety arrangements for the provision are carefully checked.
- Exclusion rates are low and students told inspectors that their lessons are very rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. All staff agree that students behave well.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students have a very secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They say the school provides information about e-safety and know what to do should they encounter cyber-bullying.
- Students told inspectors how well supported they are and that teachers would notice if they were distressed in any way and would offer help. They say that bullying is rare and that they actively combat any incidents. Discriminatory language is not tolerated. Students say that they take extra care of anyone who is gay and that all students feel free to be themselves.
- The school's leaders provide outstanding care for families facing challenging circumstances, including coordinating the support of external agencies, for example to build self-esteem or provide anger management support.
- The academy actively promotes safe practices and a culture of safety. All staff and parents agree that the academy keeps students safe.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Leaders' rigorous monitoring of all aspects of teaching throughout the year, and of the progress that students make, shows that teaching is of a consistently high quality with much that is outstanding.
- Students enjoy their learning because teachers often set tasks that are fun and exciting so that they engage students' interest. There is often, therefore, a buzz of excitement in lessons as students discuss their learning.
- The quality of feedback through marking is a strength. Teachers tell students how well they are doing and then offer clear and precise advice on how to improve. Students are then given time to act on this advice by re-drafting a paragraph or trying another challenge which is, in turn, marked by their teacher. This creates a constant dialogue about students' learning, which leads to rapid progress.
- Where students make the fastest progress, teachers have very high expectations, enable students to build on their previous learning and set tasks that are well matched to the different abilities within the class. Teachers are well organised, for example when they give clear information about the way that students will be assessed in their examinations. This enables students to confidently check for themselves on how well they are doing and aim for the highest level they can achieve.
- The quality of questioning across subjects is also a strength, providing challenge and encouraging students to think deeply about their work. For example, in a theatre studies lesson sixth form students debated aspects of stagecraft and characterisation. Whenever they asked their teacher a question, it was passed back to the students to work it out through skilful and probing questioning, and by reference to their previous studies.
- Literacy and numeracy are promoted well across different subjects, with most teachers focusing closely on the technical language for each subject. They place a strong emphasis on promoting reading skills and challenge students to use adventurous vocabulary when writing.
- Teachers' expert subject knowledge often inspires their students. For example, in a Year 7 French lesson, students showed great enjoyment as they led the class in an activity. The entire lesson was

conducted in French with the teacher ensuring that all words were correctly pronounced. This immersion in a foreign language resulted in all groups of students confidently conversing with each other.

- A very small minority of teachers have such high expectations of what all students can achieve that they do not always notice that a few of lower ability are finding the task too difficult. Likewise, those of highest ability sometimes are set a task that is too easy.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students typically enter the academy with below average basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Year 11 students, finishing their courses in 2014 entered with skills that were well below average. However, the proportion of these students gaining five GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics was just above average. The academy's rigorous assessment indicates that standards will rise further by the end of 2015.
- The proportion of students making and exceeding expected rates of progress in mathematics has been consistently high. In 2014, progress in English fell slightly as a result of staffing problems and the change to examination requirements that year, but inspection evidence and the academy's assessments indicate that in 2015 they will also be high. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds or between the very few who speak English as an additional language and other students.
- Students who attend the alternative provision part time in Year 10 and Year 11 achieve in line with the whole cohort.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their peers. These students receive high quality support in lessons from teaching assistants and benefit from being taught in small groups where they are well supported and encouraged. The academy's high expectations of all ensure that they have access to a full range of E.Bacc subjects. Individual support and guidance ensures that these courses match students' needs.
- The level of challenge provided in lessons and high quality teaching enable the most-able students to achieve their potential. The progress of this group of students is monitored across all subjects and assessment indicates that a larger proportion of students will achieve the highest grades in 2015 than was the case in 2014. All disadvantaged most-able students achieved five good GCSE passes in 2014.
- The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students in the school, and the gap with students nationally, are narrowing across the academy. In 2014, disadvantaged students in mathematics were almost a grade and a half behind their classmates and other students nationally. In English, they were two thirds of a grade behind their classmates and those nationally. However, these students had entered the academy a long way behind their classmates and have made outstanding progress. In 2014, the proportion of disadvantaged students making and exceeding expected progress was greater than their classmates and equal to national figures. In mathematics, there was a similar picture.
- The school has outstanding provision to develop reading skills. Literacy sessions in mixed-age tutor groups generate excitement and enable older students to support younger ones. Students of all ages express a love of reading and the library is well used.
- Students achieve very well in the sixth form, making outstanding progress.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- A significant proportion of students enter the sixth form from other providers. Only a small proportion of

students from the highest ability range make up the sixth form population. Sixth form achievement has risen over the past two years. This has been rapid over the current year because students are benefiting from consistently high quality teaching, which they say is often inspiring. Students are keen to stay on at school after their GCSE courses. The proportion staying on to complete their courses in Year 13 is above average.

- In 2014, academic attainment rose on the previous year to above national figures. The school's rigorous assessment and tracking indicates that this will rise again in 2015. Achievement in the small number of work-based courses has been above that nationally over the past two years. There is no significant difference between the performance of the very small proportion of disadvantaged students, disabled students and those who have special educational needs and other students. All students are expected to re-sit their GCSE English and mathematics examinations until they achieve at least a grade C.
- Students speak very positively about the feedback they receive on their work. Students show strong engagement in their learning, showing enthusiasm to research the topics they are studying and contribute their ideas. They appreciate their teachers' good subject knowledge and the passion they show for their subjects. Teachers provide appropriate challenge for the most-able students.
- The leader of the sixth form ensures that all receive high quality advice and guidance to support their subject choices and students speak highly of the ongoing support they receive to ensure that they achieve their goals. The academy has high expectations of students and works to raise their aspirations through a variety of university visits. As a result, a high proportion of students go on to higher education, including to Russell group universities, and in 2014 there were none who were not in education, employment or training.
- Sixth form students contribute very well to the life of the school. The mixed-age tutor groups help promote sixth formers as positive role models. Students lead the academy's strong involvement with charity fund-raising and there are many opportunities to develop leadership skills through sport, the arts and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.
- A very wide choice of study programmes are very well matched to students' prior attainment and aspirations and ensure that they are well prepared for their next steps in education, training or employment. All students have the opportunity to undertake work experience during their courses.
- Sixth form students have a thorough understanding of British values, including a strong sense of right and wrong and respect for others. There are numerous opportunities to discuss issues around democracy and personal liberty through the tutor programme, in which sixth form students often take a lead, preparing them well for life in modern Britain. Students greatly value the opportunities to experience life in countries such as Africa and India and say how this has had a dramatic influence on the way they view their own experience of education.

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

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|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Unique reference number | 136459 |
| Local authority | Warwickshire |
| Inspection number | 453317 |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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|---|-------------------------------|
| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1470 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 340 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Brian Dimpleby |
| Headteacher (Executive) | Philip Hamilton |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not Previously Inspected |
| Telephone number | 01827 702205 |
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