

Skidders' Kent Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135888
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	381952
Inspection dates	7–8 March 2012
Lead inspector	Jacqueline White HMI

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of students	11–16
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	327
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Boggis
Principal	Sian Carr
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
School address	Blackhurst Lane Tunbridge Wells Kent TN2 4PY
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Jacqueline White

Her Majesty's Inspector

Rebecca Hawkes

Additional inspector

Stephen Hume

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 25 lessons and 19 teachers. They also held meetings with members of the governing body, senior and middle leaders, and groups of students. Inspectors observed the academy's work and looked at the academy's performance data and other documents, including the academy improvement plan, safeguarding and equality policies, and the minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors took account of any responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection and analysed 124 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 100 completed by students and 54 from staff.

Information about the school

This mixed 11–16 academy opened in September 2009 and replaced Tunbridge Wells High School. It serves an area where most other schools are selective. The academy is smaller than average. The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds with approximately 22% from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of students whose first language is not English is below average but rising. There is a higher than average percentage of girls. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is also above average.

The academy has dual specialist status in science and engineering. There are plans to offer sixth form provision from September 2012. A building programme is underway. Scheduled to be completed by Spring 2013, it will provide a completely new school. The Skinners' Company and The Skinners' School are lead sponsors of the academy with Kent County Council and K College contributing as co-sponsors. The academy works in close partnership with The Skinners' School, a selective school in Tunbridge Wells. The academy meets government's current floor standards, the minimum expectations set for attainment and progress.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of students	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of students	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is a good school that is improving rapidly. Aspects of its work are outstanding. Governors and leaders are highly ambitious for the success of every student. They have instilled high expectations and a 'no excuses' approach to school improvement. Excellent relationships between staff and students are built on mutual trust and underpin the supportive learning environment. Students, parents, carers and staff are overwhelmingly positive about the academy and its work. Senior leaders rightly identify the further improvement of teaching and students' achievement as priorities in securing outstanding overall effectiveness.
- Achievement is good. There has been a relentless and successful focus on raising attainment. Students now make at least good progress and many make outstanding progress. Generally, students' literacy skills are underdeveloped when they join the academy. A cross-curricular approach to tackling this issue and developing students' resilience and confidence in learning is making an impact but it is not yet fully embedded. A very strong trend of improvement in the percentage of students gaining five GCSE results at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics has been secured. However, the gap with the national average has not yet been closed.
- Teaching is mainly good with an increasing proportion that is outstanding. High-quality professional development underpins the growing strengths of individual teachers but there are some inconsistencies, particularly in the use of assessment.
- Students are unanimous in saying they feel completely safe in school and extremely well looked after. The high levels of tolerance and respect that students show each other and staff are an exemplary feature of the academy. Students value learning and are tremendously proud of their school and its achievements.
- The tenacious pursuit of excellence is the touchstone of leadership at every level. Self-evaluation is thorough, tough and accurate. The penetrating focus on improving teaching is uncompromising. Staff are clear about their accountability and, like the students, are proud to be part of a team that will only settle for

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excellence.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Bring the percentage of students gaining five A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics in line with the national average in 2012 by embedding the cross-curricular approach to improving students' literacy, resilience and confidence in applying learning.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by sharing best practice in the use of assessment to support learning in lessons, especially ensuring students are fully engaged in identifying strengths and weaknesses in their subject-specific skills and understand how to improve them.

Main report

Achievement of students

Most students join the academy with very low attainment. They make consistently good progress and many make outstanding progress so that attainment is rising strongly. Parents, carers, and all students, recognise this.

The academy's reliable assessment information and work seen in lessons show that students' performance in relation to key indicators is likely to come into line with national averages this year. Data for 2011 suggest that attainment is low. However, every term secures improvement and the attainment of many students is now closer to average. There are no underperforming groups. Students known to be eligible for free school meals make good progress as do disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Those for whom English is an additional language make outstanding progress.

All students know their targets and their progress is reviewed regularly and rigorously to provide further challenge or highly effective support as necessary. High expectations and a clear focus on developing the knowledge and skills students need to move on to the next level of attainment were key features of the most effective learning observed during lessons. For example, in an outstanding humanities lesson students made excellent progress in analysing the complexity of the slave trade because, first, their emotional and intellectual responses were developed expertly through discussion of different sources of evidence and then, second, they evaluated their written conclusions against success criteria they understood and could apply.

Quality of teaching

Lesson observations, discussions with students and work in their books confirmed that, overall, teaching is good and increasingly outstanding. The parents and carers

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who responded to the questionnaire were almost unanimous in the view that their children are taught well. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use their expertise to plan well-structured and purposeful lessons. Within lessons and extra-curricular activities there are excellent opportunities for students to explore spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues.

Where teaching was at its most effective, some common characteristics were observed. A range of challenge, integral to learning objectives, catered for students' different starting points and ensured they built successfully on previous learning. Interesting and well-sequenced activities captured students' interest. The pace was brisk yet responsive to their needs. Timed activities, linked to carefully selected resources, were used very well to drive progress. Well-managed group and paired work developed students' thinking, speaking and listening skills. Probing questioning techniques deepened understanding and evaluated students' progress. Where teaching was satisfactory, the pace sometimes slackened. Teachers were not so skilful in ensuring students' active engagement and encouraging them to apply new learning.

The quality of marking has strengthened considerably. The academy policy is implemented consistently and very well in many subject areas. However, students do not always understand the connection between pointers for improvement in marking and their longer-term targets. There is inconsistency in how well they know how to achieve these. Some are able to identify precisely the skill they need to work on, such as fractions or the past tense in French, others feel they need only 'work harder' or 'practise more' in order to achieve the next step in their learning.

Behaviour and safety of students

In the calm, orderly and harmonious community of the academy, students feel they belong. They understand very clearly how to keep themselves safe and all groups feel safe in school at all times. This is reflected in the questionnaire returns of students and their parents and carers. Students' positive attitudes contribute to their good and often outstanding progress in lessons. They are also evident in the many leadership roles that students fulfil conscientiously within and beyond the academy. For example, they work as peer mentors and run the influential academy council. The academy has a family ethos where students are known as individuals and, as a result, there are high levels of courtesy and consideration towards others. This is summed up in the comment of one parent who wrote to say, 'There is a real family feel to the place but it is a family with strong values that bring out the best in children.' Bullying of any kind is rare and dealt with rigorously. A measure of the responsibility that students take to maintain high standards of behaviour is their leadership of the student court that sits to consider any misdemeanours and works with staff to identify appropriate sanctions.

Students are punctual to lessons and their broadly average attendance is improving quickly. Fixed term exclusions have fallen dramatically and are now well below the national average. Communication between the key staff and other agencies is very

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effective in making sure students who are vulnerable as a result of their circumstances are safe and achieve well.

Some parents raised concerns about disruption in lessons. Inspectors saw absolutely no disruption in lessons or around the academy and the academy's records over time show excellent improvements in behaviour.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is exceptional and works relentlessly; she is very well supported by talented and highly committed senior leaders and governors. Priorities for improvement are clearly identified, known and understood. Strong accountability and professional support are well-balanced. Staff are unified in their ambition that students realise their potential both academically and personally. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated. This determination to secure a successful future for every student drives high expectations and is focused sharply on the rigorous monitoring and improvement of teaching. The good curriculum is continuously under review and provides students with rich experiences to broaden their horizons and promote deep study. With the extensive range of extra-curricular activities, it contributes very well to students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

The breadth of expertise within the governing body and their complementary mix of skills enables governors to make an exceptional contribution to raising standards. Safeguarding procedures meet all current requirements and practice is exemplary. The impact of excellent leadership is evident in the transformed outcomes for students and their equality of opportunity. Given the year-on-year improvement in examination results and the fidelity with which policies and procedures are adhered to, the academy demonstrates outstanding capacity to sustain and continue to build on improvements.

The academy is outward-looking. It is making its mark in the wider community as a place where students can flourish and achieve highly. Well-established partnerships with local schools are mutually beneficial in extending students' opportunities. Highly constructive relationships with parents are based on openness and a desire to work together in students' best interests.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its students' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its students well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its students.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its students. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the students' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of students at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well students behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Students' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well students acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which students are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the students' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe students are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Students' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Skinners' Kent Academy, Tunbridge Wells TN2 4PY

Thank you for the help that you gave to the inspection team when we visited your academy recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up time to join discussions with the inspectors and to those of you who completed the questionnaire. You are rightly proud of the academy. It is a good and rapidly improving school. Some aspects of its work are outstanding.

You achieve well and make at least good and often excellent progress from your starting points. Consequently, results at GCSE are rising strongly. You benefit from good teaching in most of your lessons, with an increasing amount that is outstanding. Your outstanding behaviour is a strength of the academy. The excellent relationships you have with your teachers and with each other make it a very supportive place of learning where everyone strives to succeed. You enjoy learning and value the rich and varied opportunities provided for you. This shows in your improving attendance.

You work hard and make an important contribution to the running of the academy, through, for example, the active council and the student court.

The leaders of the academy are very ambitious for you and their excellent leadership means the academy is well placed to improve further. We have given priority to raising your achievement further and increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching. Important elements within these two objectives are developing your literacy, resilience and confidence in learning and ensuring that you all know how to improve your subject-specific skills. We are confident that you will continue to work with staff to achieve these things and we wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline White
Her Majesty's Inspector

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