

Outwood Academy Valley

Valley Road, Worksop, S81 7EN

Inspection dates

11–12 March 2014

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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Outstanding leadership and management ensure that the quality of teaching and students' achievement are continually improving.
- From average starting points most students make at least good progress and reach above and, sometimes, well-above average standards when they leave Year 11.
- Teaching provides well planned and interesting tasks, good class management, a clear focus on improving literacy, and opportunities for gaining the skills and knowledge needed for examination success. All contribute to students' good achievement.
- The sixth form is good. Students' excellent attitudes to learning and good teaching ensure that students make good progress and reach above-average standards in A-level examinations.
- The curriculum is a strength of the academy. Opportunities for students to pursue courses that interest them, a wide choice of course choices and a wealth of enrichment activities ensure that most students enjoy learning.
- Students' behaviour is good and they are proud of their academy. They look smart and are friendly, kind and respectful to each other, to staff and to visitors. They feel very safe in the academy.
- Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. There are very robust systems in place to manage staff performance, share good practice, and identify and tackle any weaker areas of the academy's work. Consequently, the academy is well placed to improve further.
- The governance provided by the Outwood Grange Academies Trust and the Outwood Academy Council is highly effective.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is good but not outstanding. Students are not always moved on quickly enough to the next task when they are ready and levels of challenge are not consistently high enough, particularly for the most-able students.
- Although now narrowing, a gap remains between the achievement of students who are supported by the pupil premium and that of their classmates.
- Attendance, although improving, remains just below the national average. The attendance of some groups of students, such as those eligible for free school meals, is not high enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 42 lessons and part-lessons of which three were joint observations with senior staff. The Principal and lead inspector made several shorter visits to classrooms. Inspectors also observed the teaching of small groups of students and listened to students read.
- Discussions were held with students, staff, governors and representatives of the Outwood Grange Academies Trust.
- Inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at students’ books, progress data, safeguarding information and other documentation.
- Forty-five responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered as well as those from the academy’s own parental survey and from questionnaire returns completed by academy staff.

Inspection team

Ann Ashdown, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jennifer Carpenter	Additional Inspector
Russell Barr	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
Ahson Mohammed	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Outwood Academy Valley became a sponsor-led academy on 1 June 2012. Its sponsor is the Outwood Grange Academies Trust.
- This academy is much larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The academy has a joint sixth form shared with the Outwood Academy Portland. It also works closely with North Nottinghamshire College which provides vocational courses for post-16 students.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in the care of the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families, is average.
- An average proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and a similar proportion speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is well below average, while the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The academy has a reciprocal arrangement with the Outward Academy Portland to temporarily educate a small number of students on the other academy's site.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- After a year as Acting Principal, the Principal was appointed in September 2013. The senior leadership team is supported by an Executive Principal who operates across a number of academies within the Outwood Grange Academies Trust.
- The Chief Executive of the Outwood Grange Academies Trust and the Executive Principal of Outwood Academy Valley are national leaders of education who provide support and expertise to all academies within the trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching and learning outstanding so all groups of students make even faster progress by:
 - ensuring that students, particularly the most able, are consistently challenged to achieve the highest grades of which they are capable
 - narrow the gap further between the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium and that of other students by checking the learning of eligible students even more regularly and monitoring and evaluating even more closely the impact of the extra help they are given
 - checking students' learning regularly, particularly that of the most able, and moving them on quickly to the next task as soon as they are ready.
- Improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism by working even more closely with some students, particularly some of those eligible for free school meals, some disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and their parents, to make sure all are persuaded of the importance of not missing out on the good education the academy provides for its students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Work in students' books and that seen in lessons confirm the good progress students are making. The academy's tracking data shows that students' progress continues to accelerate. The more-able year group of Year 11 students are on track to achieve their targets and attain above-average standards this year.
- In 2013, 78% of students achieved five or more A* to C grades in GCSE and equivalent (such as BTEC) examinations and 49% achieved this measure in GCSE examinations only. Overall this attainment was above average. The proportion of students making expected progress was greater than that found nationally in both English and mathematics and the proportion making better-than-expected progress was above average in mathematics and broadly average in English.
- Current students are making good progress in English and their basic literacy skills are developed well across all subjects. The academy's current focus on written accuracy and correct spelling is very effective. Spelling and grammar have strong emphasis across the academy, which aims for all students to spell key words correctly.
- Students develop good mathematical skills and are adept at calculating accurately and solving problems in a range of subjects. For example, sixth form students used their mathematical skills well in their work in A-level chemistry. Students are entered early for GCSE examinations in mathematics but the curriculum provides additional subject courses for them to follow in Year 11 so this does not limit the potential of the most-able students.
- Pupil premium funding is helpful in providing eligible students with extra help to allow them to make better progress. It is appropriately spent on providing varied tuition and additional resources. 'Catch-up' funding is also used to help Year 7 students, some of whom are eligible for the pupil premium, to improve their skills in literacy and numeracy and to help them, for example, to become confident readers. However, students' attendance at, for example, extra reading sessions, and the impact of this work are not always closely monitored enough to check they make maximum progress.
- Although gaps between the attainment of students eligible for the pupil premium and that of other students were seen to be narrowing, examination results in 2013 showed a gap of approximately one GCSE grade in both English and mathematics. The proportion of students eligible for support from pupil premium funding making expected and better-than-expected progress was approximately 20% lower than that of other groups in both subjects. This gap is now narrowing but checking the learning of these students in all lessons and the effectiveness of extra help they are given, rightly, remain an academy priority.
- The most-able students make good progress but do not always reach the highest levels because they are not consistently challenged to achieve their very best.
- In the sixth form, students make good progress from their starting points and attainment in A-level examinations in 2013 was above average and average at AS level. However, the proportion achieving the A*, A and B grades was below that found nationally. The academy's recent tracking shows that current sixth form students are largely on track to reach their targets. Students have good opportunities to further their skills including, where necessary, in GCSE mathematics and English. Almost all students complete their courses and all of these went on to the university of their choice.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because they receive timely and well-focused help from teachers and teaching assistants. Those students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language also achieve well and are given well-targeted help in improving their language skills, if and when this is needed.
- The tracking of students who attend off-site provision at a sister academy ensures they attend regularly, make progress, behave well and are kept safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers manage classes effectively. Well-established routines ensure a climate exists where students can concentrate on the task in hand, share their ideas and resources sensibly and achieve well.
- Work in students' books is usually well presented, complete and reflects their good attitudes to learning.
- Work is marked regularly and students are usually given high-quality feedback. In some books, marking, although usually good, is less helpful because, very occasionally, students are not given the usual opportunities to respond to the advice teachers give.
- Interesting, well-planned activities and knowledgeable teaching engage students' interest and deepen their understanding. For example, in mathematics, students confidently manipulate complex calculations involving fractions, percentages and decimals and are adept at checking their own and each other's work – finding ways to improve their skills further.
- In the sixth form, very knowledgeable teaching and a bond of mutual respect between teachers and young adults enables students to achieve well. Good teaching also builds students' confidence as learners and prepares them well, with the knowledge and skills in both English and mathematics needed, for further study and the world of work.
- Students' study skills are developed well across all year groups and they are given good pointers on how to improve their work, which maximises their chances of examination success. Plentiful opportunities to develop good literacy skills are strong features of most teaching.
- Where the pace of learning is slightly slower, it is often because students are not moved on to the next task quickly enough when they have mastered the current work. More-able students are not always fully challenged in all subjects to extend their learning in order to achieve the higher grades.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium sometimes make slower progress when their learning in lessons and the quality of work in their books are not closely monitored. While much good practice exists, a few teachers are not always sure exactly which students are eligible for the pupil premium and, hence, cannot target the extra help precisely enough.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Clear academy routines and high expectations ensure that students look smart and take a pride in maintaining their academy building in pristine condition. Systems of rewards and sanctions are clear and understood by all students.

- Students have good attitudes to learning and most are keen to succeed. Records show that behaviour is typically good and, where there are any incidents of behaviour that disrupts learning, these are swiftly dealt with, sometimes through the appropriate use of detentions and fixed-term exclusions.
- Students relish taking responsibility and have many opportunities to express their views to academy leaders. Opportunities for taking responsibility vary – for example, fund raising for a local hospital, setting up an academy radio station, mentoring younger students, editing the academy magazine and even researching the characteristics of good teaching in their lessons.
- Students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well through meaningful assemblies, through the personal, social and health education curriculum and through numerous opportunities to take part in the enrichment activities the academy provides. Trips overseas, academy productions, sporting successes and opportunities to visit universities are all experiences students talk about with enthusiasm.
- Students in the sixth form have excellent attitudes to learning. Their mature approach to their studies makes a major contribution to the good progress they make. Their personal, social and employability skills are developed very well. They cooperate willingly with each other and have good problem-solving, communication and research skills.
- Attendance overall has improved steadily and is now just below the national average. However, the attendance of some students eligible for free school meals and that of some disabled students and those who have special educational needs is lower. The academy has not yet persuaded all students and their parents to make the most of the academy’s good educational opportunities by ensuring students attend regularly.
- The academy’s work to keep students safe and secure is good. Leaders ensure that the building is secure and that staff are closely checked for their suitability before they are appointed. Students say they feel safe at the academy. Students are also very clear about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. The very small proportion of parents who responded to the online questionnaire also feel that the academy keeps their children safe.
- Students are knowledgeable about different types of bullying, including homophobic bullying, and say that if any bullying occurs it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Typical of the way in which the academy raises awareness of bullying is a huge poster in the dining area, which entreats students to ‘lend a hand’ to stop bullying.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The high-quality leadership of the Principal, the Executive Principal, the Chief Executive, governors and leaders and managers at all levels has launched the academy to be already achieving impressive success. Leaders have been instrumental in bringing about and maintaining a momentum for improvement at the academy. Fully supported by all staff, they have created a climate in which good behaviour and good teaching can flourish and improve further.
- A strength of leadership is that staff expertise, resources, policies and procedures are all shared across the family of academies which make up the Outwood Grange Academies Trust. Excellent support for the work of Outwood Academy Valley is provided by the trust and by the national leaders of education within it and the drive for improvement is strong.

- Staff and resources are extremely well deployed. Staff feel valued and, as staff questionnaires confirmed, morale is high.
- Systems to manage the performance of staff are extremely robust. Senior and middle leaders very carefully monitor the work of their subject departments and areas of responsibility, including those in the sixth form. They check the quality of teaching and scrutinise the work in students' books. All staff are given full support and high-quality training to improve their skills.
- Staff continually strive to improve students' achievement and ensure that all students are given equal opportunity to succeed. Priorities for further improvement, such as raising further the achievement of the most able and those students eligible for free school meals, have been, rightly, identified and are being energetically tackled.
- Safeguarding requirements are met. Staff are fully trained and well aware of, for example, child protection and risk assessment matters.
- The curriculum, including that provided for post-16 students, is a strength of the academy because it is innovative, reviewed regularly and provides a wide range of different courses for students. Students have access to a hundred different after-school activities, which develop their skills in everything – for example, mathematics, Spanish, computer games and making models. They speak enthusiastically about 'pom pom club', about 'brew and review' in history and geography, and a wealth of artistic, musical and sporting activities. Students, including those in the sixth form, are given very good advice and guidance on choice of courses, careers and universities.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Representatives of the Outwood Grange Academies Trust, particularly their Chief Executive, and the Outwood Academy Valley Council all work together to oversee the academy's work. They are extremely knowledgeable about the performance of the academy compared to that of schools nationally and are skilled in the analysis and interpretation of data describing students' attainment and progress. Governors' understanding of the quality of education provided enables them to hold leaders at all levels to account for the academy's performance. They are highly involved and robust in their management of staff performance, including that of the Principal. They are very well informed about the quality of teaching. They make sure that staff are rewarded for their effectiveness in ensuring students make progress and they demand that weaknesses are tackled directly. They monitor the work of the academy extremely thoroughly through regular reports from the Principal and their own visits to observe lessons and make shorter visits to classrooms to inform themselves of the quality of learning and students' attitudes to it. Finances are extremely well managed, although spending of the pupil premium is not yet having the full effect intended on eligible students' achievement.

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	138247
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	424943

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1650
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Merrick
Principal	Angela Hull and Paul Tarn (Executive Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01909 475121
Fax number	01909 471360
Email address	enquiries@valley.outwood.com

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