

Hope Academy

Ashton Road, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside WA12 0AQ

Inspection dates 24–25 November 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The exceptional leadership of the Principal and his immediate team have ensured that this school has rapidly improved. It is now good, and is improving further across all aspects of its work.
- Leaders have a thorough and precise view of the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make. They act swiftly to challenge and support staff and pupils alike. Consequently, outcomes are steadily improving.
- Teachers are utterly committed to improving their practice and providing the best quality education they can for their pupils. Their dedication and the high-quality training programmes they receive mean that teaching is now good overall.
- The quality of support and care for pupils is outstanding. Staff are highly responsive to pupils' academic and personal needs.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Pupils are courteous; they almost always behave well in lessons and take pride in their uniform and school.
- The academy's work to develop pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is excellent. Pupils learn about complex world issues and develop into respectful, reflective individuals.
- Governors have an astute, first-hand understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. Their checks on the academy's work have directly contributed to the fast pace of improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While progress for all pupils is improving across the academy, disadvantaged pupils continue to make less progress than their peers do.
- Pupils who join the academy with skills below what is expected of their age in English and mathematics do not catch up quickly enough.
- Achievement in science and the humanities is not yet good enough.
- Learners' achievement in academic subjects in the sixth form requires improvement. Too many learners fail to complete their courses because of poor advice and guidance in the past.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching, particularly in science and the humanities, and by this raise achievement, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those of lower prior ability, by:
 - ensuring teachers have the expertise to quickly support those pupils who enter the academy with literacy and numeracy skills that are well below what would be expected for their age
 - ensuring all teachers learn from the best assessment practice in the academy, so that pupils make rapid gains in their learning in lessons.
- Ensure that increasing numbers of learners successfully complete their academic courses in the sixth form, both at the end of Year 12 and Year 13, so that post-16 outcomes reflect at least the national picture.
- Ensure that leaders precisely evaluate how additional resources are used in order to improve the achievement of those pupils who receive support through this funding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The Principal provides an exceptional model of leadership for all staff. His appointment in January 2015 was a fundamental turning point for the academy. Since then, leadership, teaching and achievement have all rapidly improved. Working with the staff, he has reshaped the academy's vision to be 'outstanding in all we do'. This has brought together the whole school in a sense of shared responsibility. The academy now buzzes with the excitement of a community that knows it is getting it right.
- The senior leadership team comprises a group of highly conscientious, intellectually astute and talented individuals who are relentless in their pursuit of excellence. Their personal and professional dedication to this community is second to none. They drive improvements with tenacity and work with the Principal to identify and nurture the next generation of leaders in the school. This has ensured that leadership at all levels in the academy has developed strongly since the last inspection.
- Leaders know the academy's strengths and weaknesses extremely well. They have taken a forensic approach to ensuring that they have a very accurate picture of the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make. They track the accuracy of teachers' predictions of examination grades and build this in to their performance management. Consequently, they can confidently demonstrate that pupils across the school are now making much more progress than was previously the case.
- The programmes of support and challenge that leaders have established to improve the quality of teaching are excellent. Teachers benefit from structured programmes of training, individualised support and from learning from colleagues in other schools. Teachers report that this has benefited them significantly. Consequently, teaching is now much improved in the majority of subjects across the academy.
- Leadership is not outstanding because, while teaching has improved enormously, it is not yet highly effective. Some disadvantaged pupils continue to make less progress than their peers and some less-able pupils in Key Stage 3 do not have the skills in literacy and mathematics to be able to make rapid progress in their subjects. Teaching in science and humanities has improved because leaders have ensured that staffing is more stable. However, the significant gaps pupils have in their knowledge and understanding mean they do not yet make good progress in these subjects.
- Subject leaders are directly responsible for checking on teaching and learning in their subjects. They conduct regular observations, planning, work scrutinies and provide weekly training sessions for teachers. This is building greater consistency of practice within subject departments, for example in the use of assessment strategies.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 3, is now a real strength. Subject leaders have worked with their teams to complete a complete overhaul of the curriculum with a focus on building skills and deepening knowledge and understanding. This is framed around a 'growth mindset' that tracks the growth of pupils' academic ability in each subject from Key Stage 3 through to A level. Leaders have ensured that there is a detailed assessment framework to support this. This enables leaders to check and improve on the rigour of the new curriculum as it unfolds.
- There is a rich range of extra-curricular activities available for pupils in the academy. These include opportunities to develop leadership skills and to develop as mentors and prefects. The planned programme of assemblies leads the school's work in developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. This provision is excellent. The Chaplain responds to current events and pupils' requests so that assemblies are relevant and topical. For example, during the inspection she led an assembly that enabled pupils to understand how, as a Christian school, they should reject Islamophobic attitudes and understand Islam as a religion of peace. Inspectors observed pupils reflecting maturely on this in lessons afterwards. The values of the academy: 'Respect, Courage, Ambition' shape learning both in and out of the classroom. This enables pupils to grow into confident, articulate and reflective individuals.
- While leaders check on the use of the pupil premium (this is additional funding used to provide support for pupils who are entitled to free school meals, or who are in the care of the local authority) they have not yet ensured that it is highly effective in making sure the gaps in the achievement of these pupils steadily close. Similarly, the use of other funding that is available to support pupils who join the school with skills well below their age has met with mixed success.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors have been instrumental in securing the rapid pace of improvements in the academy. They have established a strong leadership team, and support them in making sure the ambition and vision

for the academy drives everything that happens. For example, they expect the best of all teachers. New teachers undergo strict recruitment processes and have a detailed programme of induction to ensure that they are in tune with the academy's expectations.

- Governors ensure that arrangements for teachers' pay progression are effective. Teachers have to demonstrate that all their classes make good progress, over two years, before they can progress onto higher pay scales.
- Governors gain a first-hand picture of improvements at the academy through regular, structured visits and meetings with subject leaders. They hold subject leaders to account very well for their role in improving teaching on the ground. As a result, the competency and confidence of leaders, especially in mathematics and English have grown since the last inspection.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that all the checks required before appointing an adult to work in the school are thoroughly undertaken. They work well with outside agencies by raising any child protection issues swiftly and checking that appropriate actions are taken. Leaders undertake regular training in child protection and ensure that all adults working in the school have a good awareness of the signs that any pupil may be at risk. They take the new 'Prevent' duty seriously (this is the requirement for all schools to keep pupils safe from the risks of extremism) and use the correct systems for alerting the police to any signs that pupils are at risk of radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- There have been significant changes to staffing at the academy since the last inspection. This has necessarily led to some disruption to teaching over this time. However, those staff now at the academy fully endorse leaders' vision and work together as a learning community to improve teaching practice.
- Teaching is now good overall, despite pupils' outcomes still requiring improvement. Previous poor teaching has left significant gaps in pupils' learning that current teachers are assiduously identifying and rectifying.
- Teachers plan lessons well. This is particularly the case in English, mathematics, information and communications technology (ICT) and modern foreign languages (MFL). For example, in mathematics, teachers' planning ensures that pupils start their work each lesson from a point that reflects what they can already do. Little time is wasted completing calculations they find straightforward. Pupils are moved quickly on to more challenging work. As a result, teachers appropriately stretch the more-able pupils while providing targeted support to those who need more help.
- Teachers follow the school assessment policy well. They have interpreted this within each subject area to ensure that it meets specific curriculum requirements. Teachers provide regular feedback to pupils, both in their books and orally in class. In the best cases this has a significant impact on the progress pupils make. An example of this is where teachers make swift assessments within lessons and intervene to ensure that pupils practise a piece of work again, so teachers can be sure the pupils fully understand it before moving on to something that is more difficult.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. They have worked extremely effectively together to understand the requirements of the new National Curriculum and to interpret it so that it meets the needs of the pupils at the academy. They ensure that lessons build knowledge, skills and understanding over time and use a detailed assessment system that enables them to reflect on how effective their teaching has been.
- Some teachers support pupils' reading, writing and communication skills particularly well. This is especially evident in religious education (RE) classes. However, not all subject teams are as successful in doing this. This means that those pupils who join the academy with weak literacy skills are not able to practise and develop these regularly in different contexts. This prevents them from making rapid progress and catching up with their peers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are self-confident and self-aware. They spoke knowledgeably to inspectors about how to keep themselves safe from harm and their responsibilities in looking after their friends. There are multiple ways they can raise any concerns with adults, and they use these confidently.

- Those pupils who spoke with inspectors acknowledged that there could be some silly name-calling in school, but that bullying was not acceptable at Hope Academy. They described how pupils are now more confident in being open about their sexuality and how the academy supports them in understanding different faiths and cultures. Recorded incidents of bullying are few and far between.
- The academy's programme for personal, social and health education, complemented by well-organised assemblies and outside speakers, prepares pupils very well as they grow into young adults.
- Those pupils who spoke to inspectors, the teachers and the vast majority of parents all agreed that the academy is a very safe place in which to learn and to work.
- The academy's oversight of those few pupils who attend alternative provision is thorough. These pupils are well cared for off-site and the academy is alert to any non-attendance. Academy staff check regularly on their welfare and communicate very well with the providers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils treat each other and other adults with courtesy and respect. This is a lovely school to work in, because pupils want to learn and do not tolerate unkind behaviour. There is a calm, orderly atmosphere around the academy, and pupils respect the building and its environment.
- Pupil behaviour in lessons is almost always good. Sometimes, pupils can become uncooperative with temporary staff, but this is becoming far less common now that staffing in subjects is more stable. Sometimes pupils get distracted if they become uninterested in what they are learning, but if they do so, they rarely interrupt the flow of the lesson.
- Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning. However, work in books shows that some pupils continue to fail to take pride in their work, presenting it untidily or not completing activities.
- Pupils arrive at school punctually and look very smart in their uniform. Similarly, learners in the sixth form now arrive looking smart and setting a good example for the younger years. They are proud to be members of Hope.
- Attendance is now above the national average. Very few pupils are frequently absent from school. Incidents of behaviour that leads to short exclusions have reduced significantly. This all shows how much pupils now value their education at the academy.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- As leaders predicted, outcomes for pupils in the 2015 GCSE examinations were much lower than the national average, with pupils' progress in English and mathematics about the same as it was in 2014. However, progress for current pupils in Key Stage 4 is accelerating. Pupils in the current Year 11 are on track to achieve five good GCSE qualifications, including in English and mathematics, to be in line with the national average. Given this group of pupils started at the academy with skills well below what would be expected of their age, this represents good progress. Their success is a direct result of improvements to the quality of teaching in Key Stage 4 and of intensive, regular interventions that have addressed previous gaps in pupils' learning.
- While pupils overall are making much better progress than before, gaps in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils remain across the academy. This is the case across a wide range of subjects. However, disadvantaged pupils are making much more progress than was the case in the past.
- The achievement of pupils in science and in humanities subjects has been poor in the past. Staffing in these subjects is now much more stable and pupils are making better progress, particularly in science. However, there are significant gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills that teachers are working hard to fill. Consequently, progress in these subjects is not yet good.
- Progress across all subjects at Key Stage 3 is now improving owing to an imaginatively designed curriculum that focuses on deepening pupils' academic knowledge. This enables the majority of pupils to develop secure knowledge, understanding and skills across their subjects. However, those pupils who join the academy with skills that are well below what they should be in English and mathematics do not make rapid enough progress. They do not secure the basic skills they need in Years 7 and 8 to be able to catch up with their peers by the time they start their GCSEs.
- Pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs made better progress in 2015 and reached standards of attainment that were much better than was previously the case. Leaders ensure that current pupils are well supported in school, and they make progress that is in line with all pupils in the academy.

- The most-able pupils make progress across a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics, that is increasingly consistent with the performance of similar pupils nationally. These pupils are expected to aim for the highest grades at GCSE and many more now access appropriate qualifications, such as the single science GCSEs. Their achievement is improving steadily across the school.
- Those few pupils who attend alternative provision achieve qualifications that enable them to make progress into the world of employment. They gain certificates in functional skills for English and mathematics, and work-based qualifications that are suitable to their interests.

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- The study programmes in the sixth form are not yet good, but they are rapidly improving. As in previous years, those learners on academic programmes in 2015 did not make good progress or reach standards that compared favourably with the national average. Many learners failed to complete their programmes in Year 12 because they had started courses to which they were not suited. However, those learners following vocational pathways made excellent progress.
- As with the rest of the school, the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged learners and their peers remain wide in the sixth form.
- The leadership of the sixth form is now good. The vice principal in charge of this area provides a strong steer to staff. His evaluation of what needs to be done to secure improvement in this phase is accurate and plans are well underway. Current learners are now on appropriate study programmes and stringent checks have been made to ensure that they have the capability to complete their chosen courses. More learners from the academy are now choosing the sixth form for their post-16 studies and this is testament to the rapid improvement he has brought about.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form requires improvement overall. Learners sometimes fail to discuss and develop their ideas adequately when class sizes are very small. Also, when teachers tend to direct learners' learning as they would lower down the school, learners are not able to demonstrate readiness for the independent study they will experience at university. However, the majority of learners are now making steady progress in their courses, for both academic and vocational studies.
- Where teaching is good, learners are highly motivated and show very positive attitudes to learning. Teachers have extensive knowledge of their subject area, and use this to question skilfully and challenge learners' thinking. They ensure learners understand how the topics they are learning about relate to what is happening in the world today. This linkage enables learners to develop a secure and longer term understanding of their subjects.
- The behaviour, wellbeing and safety of learners in the sixth form are good. Attendance is now high and in line with the rest of the school. Learners are punctual and smart, and are actively involved in leadership roles across the academy.
- Opportunities for learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the sixth form are excellent. Tutorials deliver a detailed programme covering British values and academy core values as well as providing structured sessions addressing, for example, sexual and mental health issues. Learners now receive high quality independent advice and guidance about careers and further education. This ensures they receive the support they need in order to make appropriate choices for their lives after the academy.

School details

Unique reference number	136421
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	10005425

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.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1098
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	63
Appropriate authority	the governing body
Chair	Frank Cogley
Principal	Patrick Ferguson
Telephone number	01744 671930
Website	www.hopeacademy.org.uk
Email address	hopeacademy@sthelens.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 February 2014

Information about this school

- Hope Academy is jointly sponsored by the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool, the Church of England Diocese of Liverpool and Liverpool Hope University. It opened in 2011.
- The academy's stated mission is 'Working together to inspire excellence guided by Christian values'.
- The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged (this includes pupils who are entitled to free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority) is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special education needs is about average.
- The academy uses six alternative providers for a small number of Key Stage 4 learners. These are: Achievement Sports, Building Futures, Aspire Training, Knowsley Skills Academy, MPH Training and Instant Training – Hair and Beauty. These providers are all formally commissioned by St. Helens Council.
- A new leadership team is now in place since the last inspection. The Principal was appointed in January 2015. He is a national leader of education.
- A significant number of teaching staff have left the academy since the last inspection. This has led to considerable turbulence, particularly within the science department. This situation has now stabilised, and more teachers are due to start at the academy in January 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 parts of lessons across the academy. The majority of these were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' work, both in lessons and as part of structured work sampling.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the senior leadership team. These focused on the current achievement of pupils in the academy, behaviour and safeguarding, the sixth-form study programmes and the programme of support and challenge in place to improve teaching.
- The lead inspector met with the Chair of Governors and two other governors from the Monitoring and Strategic Improvement Committee.
- Inspectors met with four groups of pupils and learners, including representatives of the school council and members of the sixth form. They also spoke with pupils and learners around the academy, during social times and in classes.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation relating to the quality of teaching and performance management arrangements; behaviour, attendance and safeguarding; the work of the governing body; improvement planning and self-evaluation reports: for the academy as a whole, for the sixth form and for individual subjects.
- Inspectors considered the 144 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for Parents) and the 91 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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