

Samuel Ward Academy

Chalkstone Way, Haverhill, CB9 0LD

Inspection dates 9–10 October 2012

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students' achievement is outstanding. They make excellent progress during their time at the academy, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around the academy is exemplary. They show high levels of maturity and are keen to learn.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. It is consistently at least good and often outstanding, and this results in students making rapid progress in lessons, particularly in the main academy.
- The academy is led and managed exceptionally well. Governors and staff share the headteacher's passion and drive to improve students' achievement and increase their chances of future success.
- The governing body is highly effective because governors frequently ask difficult questions of academy leaders to ensure that its high performance does not slip back.
- A carefully designed, innovative and exciting range of subjects and after-school activities is enabling students to develop excellent social, moral and cultural understanding.
- The sixth form is good and improving strongly. Students achieve well in most subjects but in a very small number of GCE AS- and A2-level subjects, students do not always make the good progress they could because teachers' expectations are not high enough.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at one day's notice.
- Inspectors observed 33 lessons and made shorter visits to eight other lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students, senior leaders, middle managers and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors examined a questionnaire completed by 63 staff, along with 59 responses submitted by parents and carers to the online Parent View website.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documents including governing body minutes, self-evaluation details, plans, behaviour records and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors sampled a wide range of students' work, covering different year groups and ability levels.

Inspection team

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Philippa Francis	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Hartley	Additional Inspector
June Cannie	Additional Inspector
Meg Hackney	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this academy

- The academy is much larger than average secondary school, with a small sixth form.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is below average.
- The vast majority of students are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is broadly average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is below average.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress.
- The predecessor school, Samuel Ward Arts and Technology College, converted to academy status in November 2010. It was judged to be outstanding at its last inspection in September 2008.
- In September 2011 the academy, previously for students aged 13 to 18, became an academy for students aged 11 to 18 and introduced its first group of Year 7 and Year 8 students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the progress of students in a few subjects in the sixth form by ensuring that:
 - all teachers use a variety of teaching methods to capture students' interest in discussions, especially where the number of students in lessons is small, to help speed up and support deeper learning
 - teaching challenges students even further, so that every activity stretches them to make as much progress as they can in every lesson.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students make exceptional progress in most subjects and achieve very well indeed. Despite entering the academy with attainment well below the national average, the proportion of students leaving Year 11 with at least five GCSEs at grades C or above, including English and mathematics, has improved rapidly over the last three years and was high in 2012.
- The academy has focused intensively and very successfully on improving students' English and mathematics skills. The progress made in these subjects by all groups of students, including disabled students and those who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, is outstanding. As a result, students apply these core skills well in other subjects, such as science, and this helps them to make rapid progress.
- Teachers have high expectations of students' learning in lessons. As a result, students develop positive attitudes, are willing to learn and make rapid progress.
- The academy prepares students very well for when they leave Year 11 by developing the skills they will need to be successful in their future lives. For example, students improve their reading significantly through specifically timetabled reading lessons. In addition, students develop strong speaking and social skills through the extensive and innovative range of enrichment activities, which vary from a club for board games, coordinated by a sixth form student, to Thai cookery.
- The academy monitors closely the performance of different groups of students. Boys and girls achieve well. Examination results for both groups improved again in 2012, although the overall rate of improvement is faster for girls. The very small number of minority ethnic students and students who speak English as an additional language also achieve very well.
- High-quality, targeted support and intervention have ensured that the progress made by students with special educational needs is at least equal to the progress made by other students. As a result, an increasing proportion of these students are leaving with five GCSE grades at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. The achievement of looked-after children is very good.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form is good and improving notably. Students make good progress or better in most subjects. In a very small minority of subjects, students' achievement requires improvement. The academy has responded swiftly to this and has taken action to strengthen the monitoring of these few subjects. Inspectors' observations and scrutiny of students' work in these subjects confirm that managers' actions are effective.
- The large majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View feel that their children make at least good progress at the academy. Its own annual parent surveys also support this view. Inspection evidence strongly endorses these positive opinions of achievement.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching in the main academy is consistently at least good and often outstanding. This consistency in the quality of teaching over time has enabled students of all abilities to make rapid and sustained progress across a wide range of subjects. Teachers plan lessons very carefully and use their knowledge of their students to adapt the way they teach to match students' learning needs.

- Teachers use questions very effectively to check students' knowledge and to deepen their understanding. Teaching in many lessons is interesting, and so the pace of learning is brisk. Inspectors saw many examples of superb group work. In these, students thrived in taking on responsibility, often asking questions of each other and helping their peers to make progress.
- The quality of teachers' marking and feedback to students on their progress in workbooks is consistently at least good and much is outstanding. This is a result of close and frequent checks. Students make very good use of written feedback to increase the rate at which they learn.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and occasionally outstanding. In a very small number of lessons, particularly but not exclusively where student numbers are smaller, teaching does not always generate strong levels of debate and challenge from all students.
- Teachers develop students' reading and writing very well across subjects. Carefully planned additional lessons at the start of the day are helping younger students not only to improve their reading, but also to improve their confidence to read and present aloud to a group of their peers. Students develop very good writing skills and often take pride in their presentation of written work.
- Teachers reinforce students' social, moral and spiritual development through many lessons. For example, in one Year 9 French lesson students considered and discussed with confidence the moral issues linked to drugs and alcohol. In a lesson on citizenship, Year 8 students talked openly and maturely about different types of relationships, including how phrases used in arguments can sometimes be misinterpreted, and then reflected on how this can make the other person feel.
- The vast majority of parents and students expressed high levels of confidence in the quality of teaching and inspection evidence supports this.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' attitudes to learning are exemplary and this contributes significantly to the increasingly rapid progress they make, both in and out of lessons. Students of all ages and abilities show an awareness of what constitutes very good behaviour. In one Year 10 lesson for example, a student politely and effectively encouraged one of her peers, who had been briefly distracted, to concentrate on the task in hand.
 - Academy records over the last three years show that the academy excludes very few students and incidents of bullying are exceptionally low. Staff promote the academy's core values, which include respect, compassion, courage and responsibility, very successfully. These values are particularly evident in the positive way students interact with one another and with staff.
 - Students show a mature approach to keeping themselves and each other safe. They have a very good awareness of the different types of discrimination, including cyber bullying and prejudice-based bullying. In one lesson, for example, two students worked collaboratively with another student to correct her use of language in order to avoid the use of a stereotype.
 - Students in the sixth form are excellent role models for younger students in the main academy. They take their roles and responsibilities seriously and many act as mentors to help support
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younger students who may fall behind with their homework.

- The large majority of parents and staff are extremely positive about the behaviour of students at the academy. Inspectors could find no evidence to support the view of a very few parents who felt behaviour was less than good.
- Students' attendance and punctuality are excellent across all year groups. Students are keen to come to the academy and are prompt to arrive at their lessons, ready to learn. Attendance, which is already above average, continues to improve.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. Together with a highly effective governing body, a strong senior team and very committed staff, the headteacher has ensured that much of the academy's ambitious vision has come to fruition, including the recent addition of a lower school. Leaders have managed this transition outstandingly well, with the new students settling quickly and thriving as a result.
 - Raising the achievement of all students is central to the academy's well-focused improvement plans. Leaders and managers use well-established and thorough self-evaluation practices to target improvement carefully. The impact of management actions is evident in many areas, including the rapid and sustained improvement in GCSE results. The well-considered management structure supports the implementation of necessary actions well with very clear lines of accountability.
 - Managers monitor students' progress frequently and meticulously. Where required, management action to improve is highly successful. Examples include the significant increase in results in external examinations for different groups of students, such as those who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. More comprehensive checking of sixth-form students' achievement is ensuring that their progress is improving.
 - A strong focus by leaders and managers on improving the quality of lessons across subjects has been very successful. The quality of teaching and teachers' marking of workbooks have improved substantially. Very good staff training and support have ensured greater consistency in the quality of students' learning in lessons.
 - Managers review teachers' performance rigorously. Teachers are set clear targets to improve their practice, which link closely to students' success in subject examinations. Teachers' progress to the upper pay spine is considered thoroughly by managers and only occurs when there is substantial evidence of good performance.
 - The academy's aspirational values, which include developing resilience, wisdom and integrity, feature heavily in the design of the timetable for each year group, including the choice of subjects and extra after-school activities available. In planning the curriculum, managers have considered carefully the needs of students and of the local community.
 - The academy has strengthened the leadership of the sixth form significantly and this is already having an impact, such as notable improvements in the choice of subjects available in Years 12 and 13. Managers have brought about significant improvement in the sixth-form accommodation, increasing the amount of social and private study space and introducing an
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onsite internet café in the sixth-form centre that is highly valued by students.

■ **The governance of the academy:**

- uses its skills and expertise exceptionally well to support and develop the academy's ambitious vision
 - uses detailed knowledge of its local community's needs to very good effect in defining the strategic direction of the academy
 - challenges senior leaders assertively and frequently about the academy's performance
 - reviews the progress of different groups of students thoroughly and has ensured that the pupil premium is used well to improve students' learning, for example by providing tailored one-to-one tuition, additional staffing in mathematics and English and after-school activities
 - ensures that all statutory responsibilities, including requirements for safeguarding, are met.
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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	136322
Local authority	N/a
Inspection number	400218

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
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	1182
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Thomas
Headteacher	Howard Lay
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01440 761511
Fax number	01440 761899
Email address	swa@samuelward.co.uk

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