

Bath Community Academy

Rush Hill, Bath, Somerset BA2 2QL

Inspection dates

24–25 May 2016

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Pupils have underachieved significantly over time. There was a decline in GCSE results in 2015, despite predicted improvement.
- Progress in mathematics is weak and is not improving quickly enough or in line with English.
- Pupils do not have the confidence or fluency in mathematics that they need to succeed in other areas of the curriculum.
- Progress is too slow overall, but especially weak for disadvantaged pupils.
- Improvements in teaching have been too slow to prevent the downturn in examination results in 2015.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of the most able pupils. They do not set high enough targets for this group, or demand enough from them in lessons.
- Pupils lack the qualifications, advice and guidance to take confident next steps into education, training or employment.
- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have not worked from an accurate enough evaluation of the school's performance, leading them to make over-optimistic predictions for examination results.
- The academy council did not foresee the school's poor performance in 2015.
- Pupils are not entirely confident that bullying, if it arises, will be dealt with effectively. Some parents and staff share this concern.
- Attendance is too low and not showing sustained improvement.
- Although statutory requirements for safeguarding are met, record-keeping is not meticulous enough. In some cases, it is not sufficiently clear how quickly or thoroughly concerns have been followed up.

The school has the following strengths

- The academy council now has a firm grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It has begun, along with the interim principal and senior leaders of the Cabot Learning Federation, successfully to tackle the school's significant weaknesses.
- Systems for checking on and improving teachers' performance are robust. Evaluation of pupils' achievement is now accurate.
- There is evidence of improvement in teaching, attendance and behaviour since the start of this academic year.
- As a result of stronger teaching, current pupils are making better progress than in the recent past, and are beginning to make up for gaps in their learning. This is especially true in English.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards of achievement for all groups of pupils to meet, as a minimum starting point, national expectations of progress and government floor standards by:
 - building on recent improvements to teaching so that pupils make equally strong and sustained gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills in all subjects
 - accelerating improvements in mathematics to reflect recent improvements in English, so that gaps in pupils' knowledge close
 - developing pupils' confidence and ability to tackle mathematical problems, both in mathematics and across the curriculum
 - using the more accurate assessment practice now in place to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of, and to identify and challenge the most able pupils to achieve highly
 - ensuring that pupils are well equipped, with relevant qualifications and high-quality advice and guidance, so that they can confidently move on to the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Improve behaviour so that pupils make better progress and are able to thrive at school by:
 - building from pupils' compliance in lessons to consistently positive attitudes to learning and study
 - reducing the need for internal and external exclusion and ensuring that pupils returning from exclusion do not continue to disrupt learning
 - removing any uncertainty among pupils, parents and staff about the school's capacity to eradicate bullying, by implementing, and building confidence in, effective and uncompromising anti-bullying strategies
 - urgently improving attendance for all pupils, especially the small core who are persistently absent from school, and sustaining good attendance for all groups of pupils over time.
- Secure and sustain improvements in teaching, learning and behaviour, so that outcomes for pupils improve rapidly and community confidence in the school increases, by ensuring that school and federation leaders:
 - maintain a sharp and forensic analysis of the school's performance and intervene immediately to reverse any decline
 - continue to draw on the experience and additional leadership capacity of the Cabot Learning Federation while permanent leadership of the school is established and until outcomes for pupils are good
 - implement the recommendations of the Cabot Learning Federation review of safeguarding practice, so that reporting and recording systems are at all times comprehensive, clear and watertight.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- There has been a decline in outcomes for pupils since the previous inspection. Senior leaders did not anticipate this. Pupils' achievement at the end of Year 11 remains below the government's minimum expectations for progress and attainment.
- Pupil numbers are low and falling. Too many pupils do not attend regularly and a high number, compared with the national average, are persistently absent.
- The information, advice and guidance to pupils to prepare them for their next steps in education, employment or training have not been strong enough to ensure that all move on to destinations that are appropriately demanding, or suited to their talents and abilities. Pupils' choices have been limited by their underachievement at GCSE.
- Following the most recent set of examination results, the Cabot Learning Federation has taken a stronger and much more prominent role in the running of the school. This has included the appointment of an interim principal and significant support from the federation's executive principal, who is strongly influential in driving a faster pace of improvement.
- Training for teachers to improve their practice is a relative strength of the school. It is having more impact than in the past because it is more closely aligned to the school's identified weaknesses and to teachers' individual training needs.
- Systems for managing the performance of staff and for holding teachers to account for pupils' achievement have strengthened under the new leadership arrangements. Leaders have begun to take decisive action to tackle inadequacy in teaching or leadership where it emerges.
- Middle leaders have greater clarity and understanding about the role they play in improving the achievement of all pupils. Senior leaders have begun to demand more from them and most are rising to the challenge.
- Leaders have focused keenly on improving the accuracy of assessment. As a result, teachers' evaluations of pupils' achievement are more reliable this academic year. This improvement has been underpinned by teachers sharing and comparing their evaluation of the quality of pupils' work, both internally and across other schools in the federation.
- School leaders have implemented a curriculum that offers pupils a better range of subjects and qualifications than in the past. Leaders are more confident of improvement in pupils' outcomes this year because it is the first year in which pupils have followed an improved range of courses. They are working to refine this further and ensure that the curriculum better meets the needs of pupils to prepare them for their next steps. They are making appropriate use of government 'catch-up' funding to implement whole-school reading programmes and support the development of basic literacy skills.
- The curriculum is enhanced and enriched by a range of activities outside the normal school day. Pupils value these opportunities and are proud of their notable successes in competitions and events. They enjoy 'Project Phoenix' which offers them a range of after-hours activities, such as creative writing, art, drama and time to catch up with their learning.
- School leaders have established a generally calm working atmosphere in classrooms, an improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils understand that disruption to learning will not be tolerated and accept the consequences of the newly implemented and improved behaviour policy.
- Pupils understand their responsibility to one another and to the wider school community. They learn about different religious beliefs and opinions through philosophy and ethics lessons and, as a result, learn to value differences in others and the importance of equality of opportunity for all. Their grasp of the dangers of extreme and radical views is less well developed, however. Although staff are appropriately trained in this regard, their heightened awareness of such risk is not shared by pupils.
- Pupils come to an understanding of British values by subscribing to the school's values of 'respect, friendship and excellence'. They are encouraged to think about the wider implications of these guiding principles, such as in assembly, where pupils considered the contribution of multinational companies to society through taxes, or support for good causes.
- External support for the school comes from the Cabot Learning Federation, including the oversight of how well the academy council exercises its devolved powers of governance. The current significant involvement of the federation's senior leaders has secured the school's capacity to improve. However, those same senior leaders hold overarching responsibility for its decline.

■ The governance of the school

- The academy council was disappointed at the downturn in results in 2015. Members admit that they did not anticipate the extent of this and that it is a significant setback in their determination to improve the school.
 - The academy council and senior leaders of the Cabot Learning Federation have set a fresh course for improved teaching and behaviour that has made progress in some areas but not yet reversed the school's legacy of underachievement.
 - The current configuration of leadership, which involves the recently appointed interim principal, the executive principal and the academy council, has the knowledge, experience and skills to tackle the school's weaknesses and to secure its future.
 - Council members and senior leaders are working constructively with local partners to restore community faith in the school and to determine the best pathway to high-quality provision for its pupils. There is a will and determination to reach beyond the federation for expertise and support that will benefit the community.
 - Council members understand and accept their responsibility to achieve good outcomes for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. They publish figures showing how they use pupil premium funding, but are not stringent enough in evaluating its impact. Although school leaders can account for spending decisions, they cannot demonstrate that they led to good achievement for this group of pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school meets statutory requirements for recruitment and vetting of staff. Staff are appropriately trained and understand how to recognise and act on signs of risk. They have detailed knowledge of individual pupils' circumstances and needs and are wholly committed to ensuring that they are safe at school. However, their recording of actions taken to keep pupils safe is not as precise or clear as it might be.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is too dependent on the individual teacher or subject. Strengths in subjects such as geography and English are not replicated across the curriculum, so achievement is too variable.
- Teaching has not been strong enough since the previous inspection to halt a decline in standards, especially in mathematics. Consequently, the school remains below government floor standards for pupils' outcomes.
- Teachers have improved their understanding of how well pupils are doing, but do not use this well enough to plan for progression from different starting points. Pupils sometimes opt for easier approaches because teachers do not guide them to attempt more challenging work, or they set targets that do not allow them to reach the highest grades.
- There is a renewed focus by all teachers on basic literacy skills, to help pupils read and write more confidently and accurately across the curriculum. This is showing some success, but its impact varies too much according to the teacher or subject.
- New leadership in mathematics is leading to better teaching and pupils' progress is improving, but this is not enough to fill gaps in pupils' grasp of mathematical concepts, or build their confidence to apply mathematical skills fluently in different subjects when they need to do so.
- Teachers understand the individual learning needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability, and they support these pupils well to cope with the demands of school life and to be 'ready to learn'. However, they do not do enough to ensure that these pupils achieve as well as they could from their starting points.
- Senior leaders evaluate teaching over time as having focused too keenly on attaining GCSE grade C, rather than on ensuring that each individual pupil achieves as highly as possible. Consequently, the pull towards the average standard has been stronger than the reach for top grades. Too many able pupils have underachieved, or their potential has remained undiscovered.
- Senior leaders check on teachers' marking and ensure that pupils receive regular feedback on their work. However, too often this is limited to encouragement or correction. Pupils say they know **what** to improve, but not **how**. There are exceptions to this. Pupils value the feedback they receive in music and drama, for example, and are able to improve their work as a result.

- A whole-school drive to promote reading and to instil a love of books is in its early stages of development. Pupils understand the importance of reading and appreciate their teachers' determination to help them become better readers. However, this is another area where practice is too variable – reading is not promoted or valued equally well across the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Pupils report that bullying is tackled by teachers if it occurs. However, their confidence in staff to eradicate bullying is not universally high. Some pupils see tolerance of a degree of bullying as part of school life. A few parents agree that this aspect of protecting pupils' well-being needs to improve.
- Careers information, advice and guidance are improving but have been insufficiently developed in the recent past. Too often pupils' decisions about post-16 destinations have demonstrated low aspiration or have been based on a narrow set of information.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. They feel able to approach a teacher for support and know how to keep themselves safe online.
- The school monitors the safety and well-being of pupils who attend alternative provision. These pupils are following specially tailored programmes to support them to remain in education. The school liaises with Aspire Academy, parents and the local authority to monitor their progress and well-being.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- A significant minority of pupils, parents and staff continue to express concerns about standards of behaviour.
- The implementation of a new behaviour management policy has brought about some improvements, but staff are still working hard on a day-to-day basis to manage challenging behaviour and to instil positive attitudes to learning in all pupils.
- School leaders rightly point to a significant reduction in classroom disruption since the previous inspection. However, they make considerable use of internal and fixed-term external exclusion as a sanction for the minority of pupils who continue to disrupt learning. Pupils say that exclusions do not have a lasting impact on this small group – their poor behaviour continues afterwards. School leaders also acknowledge the reliance on exclusion and the need to reduce its use.
- Attendance is low and there is no sustained trend of improvement, despite recent gains. Persistent absence is high and is not declining for a significant core group of pupils.
- Pupils mostly use social space in the school with consideration for others and for the site. They are generally compliant in wearing uniform, and show respect for one another and staff around the site. They understand how to take responsibility for one another's safety, such as by conducting fire alarm drills in silence.

Outcomes for pupils are inadequate

- Achievement has been too low over time and has declined since the previous inspection. Final outcomes for Year 11 pupils in 2015 were not good enough. The proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or better, including English and mathematics, was well below average.
- Although there was better GCSE performance in some subjects, such as art, geography and music, this was offset by too many weaknesses elsewhere. Pupils did not make the progress they should have across the curriculum and particularly in mathematics.
- Pupils' skills in mathematics are underdeveloped. There is too great a lag in their grasp of mathematical concepts over time, with too little catch-up as yet. Pupils' books show gaps in their understanding and a lack of confidence or fluency in applying reasoning to different mathematical problems. New leadership in mathematics is tackling this and there are signs of improvement, but this is too late to guarantee good GCSE outcomes for the current Year 11.

- There is limited focus on the needs of the most able pupils in the school. These pupils lack teaching that stretches and challenges them to attain higher grades, even where they are capable of doing so. The school's internal analysis of pupils' achievement does not include a 'most able' category. Of the small number of last year's Year 11 pupils who joined the school with a high level in mathematics, over half did not convert this good start into the expected high grade at GCSE.
- Disadvantaged pupils mirror their peers in making too little progress overall, and particularly in mathematics. As with all pupils, there is some improvement evident in current work, and some indication that pupils are closing the gap on their peers, especially in Year 9.
- Teachers and other staff enable pupils who have special educational needs or disability to access the curriculum by working with them to ensure their 'readiness to learn'. Staff are fully committed to supporting this group of pupils, but have been more successful in meeting their personal and social needs than in helping them to make better progress academically. This is also a changing picture, with a stronger focus on pupils making progress from their individual starting points beginning to bear fruit, especially in English. The few pupils who attend alternative provision at Aspire Academy are making adequate progress on individualised study programmes.
- Current progress in lessons and across subjects is improving, as a result of actions taken to improve teaching and the curriculum. School leaders are confident of better outcomes in 2016 examinations, but their predictions are based on improvement that is recent and not equally embedded across all subjects.

School details

Unique reference number	138394
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	10013093

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	290
Appropriate authority	The academy council
Chair	Con Alexander
Principal	Chris Hall
Telephone number	01225 426268
Website	www.bathcommunityacademy.org
Email address	Chris.hall@bathcommunityacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	8–9 October 2015

Information about this school

- Bath Community Academy is a smaller than average-sized upper school.
- The school is sponsored by the Cabot Learning Federation, a partnership of schools sponsored by Rolls Royce PLC and the University of the West of England.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through pupil premium funding is above the national average. This is additional government funding to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those who are in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above the national average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- The school is working with the Cabot Learning Federation as the academy sponsor. This formal partnership facilitates leadership support from the executive principal, training for teaching staff and leadership support for middle leaders.
- An interim principal was appointed to the school, from within the federation, in February 2016.
- The school receives regular support from the executive principal of the Cabot Learning Federation.
- The school uses alternative provision for a very small number of pupils at Aspire Academy in Bath.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that serious allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the allegations were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning and scrutinised pupils' work across a wide range of subjects and year groups. Many observations of learning were conducted jointly with school leaders.
- Discussions took place with the principal, the executive principal, the chief executive of the Cabot Learning Federation, other school leaders, various members of staff and three governors, including the chair of the academy council.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, minutes of meetings, reports, records of leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, assessment and tracking information for current pupils, case studies, and behaviour and attendance information.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, policies and procedures, and spoke to the local authority designated safeguarding officer.
- Inspectors spoke to many pupils from all year groups about their experience at the school. During lessons inspectors looked carefully at the quality of pupils' work, and the accuracy of the school's assessment information.
- Inspectors took into account the 14 responses from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 34 responses from the staff questionnaire.

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