

Mildenhall College Academy

Bury Road, Mildenhall, Bury St Edmunds, IP28 7HT

Inspection dates 10–11 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Sixth form provision	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leaders, including middle leaders and governors have, in a short time period, established a culture of high expectations that has led to improvements in achievement, behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Strong teaching is leading to accelerated progress as teachers make good use of a range of strategies to match the work to the abilities of individual students.
- The imaginative development of the curriculum means that students have access to a wide range of courses that enables them to make good progress. It also develops their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development well.
- Students feel safe. They behave well and are courteous in their interactions which has a positive impact on learning and progress.
- Students are confident about their futures. They benefit from good-quality information, advice and guidance.
- The sixth form is now good. Students study a range of courses that equips them well for the next stage of education and employment. Many are achieving well across a range of subjects and display a clear enthusiasm for learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While there are clear improvements in achievement and attainment, this is not consistent. Boys' writing needs further improvement.
- The good work done to develop an enthusiasm for learning in the large majority of students is not evident in the attitudes of a very small minority.
- Not all parents feel they are well informed about the progress their children make.
- In a small number of lessons teaching does not consistently challenge all students and this can hold back their progress.
- A small number of teachers do not regularly provide feedback to students in a way that is clear and helps them to improve their work.
- The academy leaders' monitoring of the progress of students in full-time alternative provision is not as strong as that of students educated within the academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 54 lessons or parts of lessons. Several lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised students' work in lessons and in a separate work sample.
- Inspectors spoke with students and observed their behaviour during lessons, before the start of the school day and at break times.
- Inspectors scrutinised documentation including that relating to achievement, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, the academy's systems for monitoring and improving teaching and learning, self-evaluation, the academy improvement plan, records of governors' meetings and details of how additional funding to support disadvantaged students is used.
- Inspectors took into account 82 staff responses, 108 responses to the online ParentView survey and two written parental responses received during the inspection.
- Inspectors held discussions with academy leaders, governors, teachers and support staff, Academy Transformation Trust representatives and a parent.

Inspection team

John Lucas, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jason Howard	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lucie Burrow	Additional Inspector
Jane Ladner	Additional Inspector
Joanna Jones	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Mildenhall College Academy, which is part of the Academy Transformation Trust, converted to an academy on 1 July 2013.
- The academy began to admit students into Year 7 in 2012 as a result of the reorganisation of education in Suffolk. The students currently in Year 10 entered the academy in Year 8 and those in Year 11 entered in Year 9.
- The academy is slightly larger than most secondary schools. It has a sixth form which is based just over a mile from the main site.
- A vast majority of the student population is White British.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is below the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium funding is higher than the national average. This is additional government funding for particular groups of students, including those eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care.
- A very small number of students attend full-time alternative provision at providers which include the Albany Pupil Referral Unit and Mill Meadow Pupil Referral Unit.
- The academy meets the current national floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement further by
 - ensuring that all teachers apply academy procedures for planning and delivering lessons that match the abilities of students in order to accelerate their progress
 - ensuring that feedback given to students on their work is precise and subject specific so enabling students to improve
 - building upon the good work done to develop the quality of writing, particularly for boys
 - ensuring that leaders' monitoring of the progress made by students accessing full-time alternative provision is consistently strong.
- Further develop the strategies to work with parents and carers so that all are well informed about the progress of their children.
- Build upon the good work done to improve attitudes to learning by increasing the number of routes by which students can communicate their views.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal is determined that all students achieve the best academic outcomes and develop the range of life skills that they require to be highly successful individuals. This determination is shared by staff across the academy who are clear about priorities for improvement. The leadership team consistently promote their collective vision and high expectations which has led to rapidly changing attitudes to learning. This is improving the standards of achievement and attainment.
- Senior leaders' careful monitoring ensures that they have an accurate knowledge of teaching and learning. This, combined with their willingness to tackle weak practice, is leading to teaching improving strongly across the academy with good or better progress being seen in a very large majority of lessons.
- Staff appreciate the range of professional development opportunities provided. This includes work done by leaders, including middle leaders, within the academy as well as that by the trust. For example, weekly professional development sessions take place before school which are focused upon the priorities outlined in the academy's development plan. This is having a positive impact. Training on how best to meet the needs of higher achieving students has helped to ensure that they make good progress.
- The work of middle leaders to improve the quality of teaching and provision is having a marked impact on achievement. Pastoral leaders track the academic progress of students in their house groups and coordinate interventions that are helping these students to make good progress.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and motivates students to learn. Students have access to a wide variety of courses, including vocational subjects in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Leaders, including subject leaders, review the curriculum on a regular basis. Their adaptations help students to progress. There is a strong focus in the curriculum on heightening students' awareness of career opportunities in the local area and beyond. The curriculum is enriched by a range of lunch time and after school activities such as the LIFT literacy club, rugby, music, astronomy, catering and art courses.
- There is effective information, advice and guidance within the academy which is leading to increased motivation. Year 11 students speak about how much they value the opportunities to sample post 16 provision. The proportion of Year 11 who are making applications to continue their studies is increasing and there has been a marked improvement in those continuing their studies from Year 12 in to Year 13 as a result of this guidance.
- Leaders promote literacy well, with a book club, readathon and increasing levels of collaboration with local primary schools. This is leading to good achievement for a large majority of students.
- The academy promotes social, moral, spiritual and cultural education well. This is carefully planned and tracked by senior leaders. In a Year 10 lesson students engaged in research about pacifism. In another lesson students were holding discussions about different faiths. Sixth form students have the opportunity to mentor their younger peers, something that the younger students appreciate. There is a wide range of visits, including to Parliament, theatres and different countries. This is complemented by speakers from sporting, business and academic backgrounds as well as links with schools in Europe and Africa. The academy promotes British values well through the curriculum. Events such as the sixth form political awareness week and voting for school student council members bring to life democratic practices for students. Students and adults within the academy take great pride in the fact that they took part in a project to develop a World War One memorial in Belgium.
- Senior leaders have worked successfully to engage more parents into school life. Parents and carers are offered advice on how to support students with homework and study skills and can track their children's achievement through a link on the academy website. The Principal has visited the homes of some students to promote closer working with specific groups. Attendance at parent evenings is increasing because the school provides general as well as subject specific information. Nevertheless, not all parents feel well-informed about the progress of their children.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively and the academy does not tolerate discrimination of any

kind. Funding to support disadvantaged students is well targeted and academy data indicates this is having a positive impact upon the progress being made by this group of students. This was supported by the evidence seen in students' work and lesson observations

- While leaders track the attendance of students who access full-time alternative provision carefully, the tracking of these students' progress is not as strong.
- Members of the trust, who support leaders effectively, are ambitious in their plans for the academy. They have made significant resources available and these have been used well to improve the quality of the academy site, improvements in teaching and accelerated progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors, under the leadership of the knowledgeable Chair of Governors, are ambitious, well-informed and hold academy leaders to account for the standard of education and care they provide. The governing body challenges senior leaders on pertinent issues relating to the quality of teaching, achievement and behaviour. Governors assure themselves of the accuracy of data by checking that it is validated by external bodies.
 - The governing body is clear on the priorities for the academy. They visit subject areas within the academy then provide reports to leaders. This information has contributed to an improvement in the quality of provision in key subjects.
 - Governors and the trust set challenging performance management targets for the Principal. They also ensure that performance management of other staff is robust. Performance management targets focus upon the correct priorities but do not always have clearly measurable targets.
 - The Academy Transformation Trust is represented on the governing body and brings a level of knowledge and expertise that has enabled governors to carry out their role to good effect.
 - Governors ensure that the academy's statutory responsibilities concerning safeguarding are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. It reflects the academy leaders' efforts to promote high standards and a positive climate for learning.
- Staff and students comment that there has been a significant improvement in behaviour which is helping students to make better progress. Exclusions have reduced year on year. They rose this year as the recent robust amendments to the consequence system have taken effect, but remain below national levels.
- Attendance shows continuous improvement and is now broadly in line with the national average. Overall persistent absence has fallen continuously and is below national averages. Effective systems are in place to improve attendance further.
- On a large academy site, students move around safely and purposefully, arriving at lessons on time and well prepared for learning. Students take pride in the work that they are producing in almost all subjects.
- Students display positive attitudes to learning which helps them to make good progress. One example of this was seen in a Year 7 mathematics lesson where lower ability students made good progress as they explained their ideas to each other and collaboratively persevered with tasks that they initially found difficult.
- The attitudes to learning of a small minority of students do not match the high standards of others. This can lead to low level disruption but the very large majority of teachers are adept at managing this and it therefore does not impede pupils' progress.
- Through the introduction and subsequent review of a new consequence system academy leaders are able to use resources effectively to ensure that students behave well and take even more responsibility for their own behaviour. Behaviour of students educated in alternative provision is carefully monitored and is

good.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students commented that they feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They are aware of risks including those related to e-safety. The work that academy leaders have carried out to make the site safe, through the introduction of new facilities and fencing around the perimeter of the fields is appreciated by students and adds to this feeling of safety.
- Students are aware of different forms of bullying and are clear as to who to go to if they have concerns. This awareness is due in no small part to the senior leaders' campaign to make sure that high expectations of behaviour are met which has heightened students' awareness of bullying.
- Academy records indicate that incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with effectively. A very small minority of students would like a broader range of avenues to speak about friendship issues that they may be experiencing.
- The academy monitors vulnerable students carefully. The 'Behaviour and Emotional Support Team' (BEST) has been established to support these students in their learning and emotional well-being. The academy's careful records demonstrate that this is well used and has a positive impact on their behaviour and academic progress. Vulnerable students report that they feel confident to seek the help of the BEST team.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Previously, standards of attainment and achievement were low. This was due to too much variability in the quality of teaching. Teaching over time has improved and is now good. In very many subjects, including English and mathematics, this has secured good progress because teachers set ambitious targets, in line with academy policy. Students speak with pride about their progress which they plot on their personal progress tracking sheets in lessons.
- Teachers' planning targets the specific abilities of different groups of students. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson, students made rapid progress when analysing quotations as they listened carefully to the teacher's explanation. They then made good use of personalised targets for improvement as the teacher moved to each group to offer advice to individuals.
- The quality of teachers' questioning is good and in some cases outstanding. This enables students to deepen their knowledge and further their understanding as they did in a Year 10 English lesson where careful questioning helped them to develop, discuss and debate their thoughts about a character in a novel. This resulted in more mature, complex ideas. In another Key Stage 4 lesson dynamic teacher presentation and questioning enabled higher attaining students to gain a strong understanding of the reaction of chemicals when placed in water.
- Teaching ensures that students reflect upon teacher feedback and so improve their work. This leads to good progress because students understand how to make their work better and usually act upon the advice given. There are, however, occasions where the feedback provided by teachers is not clear enough.
- Teaching gives students confidence to assess their own progress and that of their peers. This has significant impact on students' progress. For example, in a Year 8 art lesson students successfully challenged each other to improve their understanding further by giving advice using subject specific knowledge. In a Year 13 public services lesson students debated each other's thinking which accelerated their understanding.
- In a very small minority of lessons, teaching is not matched to the abilities and interests of lower attaining students which can make them slow to settle to their work and limits their progress.
- The effective links between support assistants and teachers help students to progress. Making use of the

training that has been provided by the academy's leaders, teaching assistants question the students that they are supporting well.

- Teaching of literacy and numeracy in subjects across the school is good. Students make use of the application of mathematical knowledge across a range of subjects, for example, in science. Leaders have focused upon developing literacy, in particular, to address the handwriting of boys and good extended writing was seen in lessons. Although this is having a positive impact, it needs to be developed further in order that boys can make the same accelerated progress being made by girls.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement is good because students across many subjects are making good progress from their individual starting points which are often low.
- Students join the school with standards significantly below that found nationally. The 2014 Year 11 cohort who joined the school in Year 9 achieved standards well below the national average. Their progress was also below that which could be expected for them.
- Senior leaders have been diligent in improving teaching and learning and students' achievement has now improved substantially. This is particularly marked in mathematics, languages and humanities and was seen in lessons, students' work and evident in the academy's progress data.
- Academy predictions, which have previously been found to be accurate, indicate significant rises in attainment across many subjects including English and mathematics. This is despite the fact that the current Year 11 has lower attainment on entry than the 2014 cohort. This evidence was supported by the good quality of learning seen in lessons, externally validated assessments as well as in the quality of work seen in students' books. Students who joined the academy in Year 7 are making even more progress than students who joined in Year 9.
- Early entry in English literature and information and computer technology (ITC) is building the confidence of students. Current Year 11 students have already achieved 75% A*- C in English literature and 70% in ITC. These GCSE examinations were taken by almost all Year 11 students.
- In 2014 disadvantaged students' attainment was significantly below that of others nationally. Their progress now, in lessons and over time, is good. Academy data and evidence in lessons and books indicates that attainment will rise significantly in 2015. Gaps with other students nationally are in line to close considerably in English and mathematics. The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students in the academy is closing rapidly from almost one and a half grades to below three quarters of a grade in English and in mathematics. Gaps in lower years have closed and some cases are being eradicated.
- A very small minority of students attend full-time alternative provision. Some do not make good progress across all subjects. Intervention strategies are in place to ensure that these students are able to achieve to the best of their abilities.
- Students with disabilities and special educational needs make at least as much progress as their peers from their individual starting points because of the effective support that they receive.
- The most able students are benefitting equally as much because of good teaching, effective use of setting and master classes such as the 'Tomorrow's Achievers' group. Academy data indicates that these students are on track to make good progress across both key stages. Evidence of this accelerated progress was seen in lessons as well as in students' work.

The sixth form provision is good

- The sixth form has a very positive, distinctive atmosphere. Students enjoy the autonomy of their sixth form, yet also are keen to take part in the life of the academy as a whole.
- Leaders in the sixth form consistently track progress with care and rigour. Their data indicates that the proportion of students on track to gain A level grades A* to B, as well as the proportion who are on track to secure grades A* to E, is significantly higher than that achieved by the more able cohort of 2014. It also demonstrates that there are marked increases in both standards and in rates of progress in vocational subjects. This evidence is supported by the good or better progress seen in students' work.
- In 2014 A level and A/S level standards improved but still remained below national averages which can be explained in part by the low attainment of students on entry to the sixth form. Achievement in 2014 was broadly in line with national expectations in A level and AS level. In both cases this was an improvement on the previous year. Achievement was above national averages in the diploma extended project, the technical certificate, and the level 3 diploma and broadly in line for other courses.
- A flexible and appropriate curriculum, allied to the fact that information, advice and guidance are now much more effective has ensured that students are on courses which interest and challenge them. They have benefitted greatly from opportunities to speak with or visit universities and prospective employers.
- Students have high aspirations and they speak with passion about how much they appreciate the work of the sixth form leader and of their teachers and mentors, many of whom offer academic support outside of normal lesson times. Attendance is high. Students feel safe, secure and well cared for. Students take advantage of provision such as the weekly nurse drop in sessions. Students are clear that the sixth form prepares them well for life as independent adults.
- Teachers' careful planning provides opportunities for students to write extensively and analytically. In a Year 12 English lesson students were able to annotate poetry effectively to reach conclusions collectively. Year 12 psychology students confidently used subject specific vocabulary in high level analysis about stress. Timely and precise feedback enables students to improve their work. In a business studies lesson students' work had been carefully analysed, ensuring that all students are above their target grades.
- The mentoring programme has helped students to develop their study skills and to prioritise their time. The impact of this is evident in the maturity with which students manage their learning and make use of independent learning time. When not in lessons, mentoring or other scheduled activities many students work in offices that they have been given ownership of, making good use of their time in doing so. This is contributing to accelerated progress in many subject areas as well as a love of learning.
- Students enter into reflective discussions about topics such as tolerance of other cultures and beliefs as a result of a well-planned programme which includes events such as political awareness week, visits both in Britain and abroad as well as student led assemblies. Students are able to access up to 100 hours of work experience, dependent upon their course of study. This is helping to develop their preparedness for the world of work. They speak with pride about this contribution to wider academy life, such as mentoring their younger peers.

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 students' needs. This ensures that students 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 students' needs. Students 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 students 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	139867
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	453403

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1087
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	199
Appropriate authority	The proprietor
Chair	Ian Gray
Principal	Susan Byles
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01638 714645
Fax number	01638510184
Email address	reception@mca.attrust.org.uk

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