

Furness Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135940
Local authority	Not Applicable
Inspection number	381968
Inspection dates	25–26 January 2012
Lead inspector	Michael McIlroy HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-Maintained
Age range of students	11–16
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	1,352
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Attwood
Headteacher	Douglas Blackledge
Date of previous school inspection	Not Applicable
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 48 lessons taught by 48 staff and four of these observations were jointly conducted with members of the senior team. Inspectors also met with five groups of students, nominated staff and with the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the academy's work, and looked at the academy's self-evaluation, documentation for safeguarding students, academy policies and its attainment and tracking data. Inspectors also looked at 164 parental questionnaires as well as 139 from students and 92 from staff.

Information about the academy

The academy opened in September 2009 and is an amalgamation of three predecessor schools. It is larger than most secondary schools. It is sponsored by Barrow Sixth Form College, Furness College and the University of Cumbria. It operates on two sites which are over a mile apart, one of which is divided by a main road. Both sites cater for students aged between 11 and 16.

The number of students admitted into Year 7 is lower than those leaving Year 11, which reflects the decline in the local student population. There is a smaller proportion of girls than is usually found in other secondary schools. Almost all students are of White British heritage and the proportion of students known to be eligible for free academy meals is above average. The percentage of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is average. Few students leave or join the academy other than at the beginning and end of the school year.

The academy's specialism is sport and in 2011 it met the current floor standard. Since opening, 30 staff have left the academy. Last year, the academy received a monitoring inspection, when its progress was judged to be satisfactory. It is planned that the academy will move into one new building in September 2013.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	4
Achievement of students	4
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of students	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this academy requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The academy is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the attainment and progress of students in mathematics.
- The achievement of students is inadequate. Although the academy's leaders have been successful in bringing about some improvements in mathematics, the attainment of students and the rate of progress they make in this subject have not improved sufficiently. Overall, the improvement initiatives in mathematics have not had enough time to have an impact on students' achievement; consequently, students are not achieving as well as they should. Results have risen strongly in English and students make satisfactory progress in this subject. Results in many other subjects are in line with national averages. Overall, GCSE results have risen but are still well below average.
- Teaching is satisfactory and improving. Much is good and some is outstanding but some teaching is inadequate, particularly in mathematics. There are inconsistencies in marking and in the setting of homework.
- Students feel safe in the academy and their attendance has risen. Behaviour is satisfactory and improving due to a strong focus on making improvements and new strategies to tackle poor behaviour. Although most behave well, a small minority of students occasionally disrupt lessons. Students get on well together and collaborate particularly well in lessons on account of the effective work of the academy on developing their interpersonal skills.
- The Principal, senior staff and the governing body know the weaknesses of the academy and have made improvements on a number of fronts, including the broad curriculum which is popular with students. They have met well the challenge of amalgamating three schools into one. Robust performance management and training

have brought about improvements in the quality of teaching in most departments but more needs to be done in mathematics. Inconsistencies remain in how well policies such as the monitoring of teaching and homework, are applied across the academy. Most parents, carers and students are supportive of the academy's work.

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' attainment and accelerate the progress they make in mathematics by:
 - improving the quality of teaching in mathematics by July 2012 so that no inadequate teaching remains and increasing the proportion of good teaching
 - strengthening monitoring of teaching, learning and students' work in mathematics so that weaknesses and inconsistencies are identified and tackled quickly
 - increasing teachers' expectations of what students can achieve in mathematics lessons and of how they present their work
 - ensuring that data are better used in lesson planning to ensure that all students, including the more able, are routinely set work that matches their abilities
 - strengthening students' basic skills in mathematics and enabling the greater and more frequent application of these skills in other subjects
 - raise the profile of mathematics across the curriculum and the academy, for example, through relevant displays
 - ensuring that all staff in the mathematics department have access to relevant training.
- Sustain the improvement already made in students' behaviour by:
 - strengthening supervision procedures during split lunchtimes to prevent disruption to classes
 - providing a better balance between rewards and sanctions
 - further reducing temporary exclusions.
- Improve the consistency of how policies are applied across the academy, for example, in the setting of homework, how the performance of staff is monitored and how 'learning groups' are used to raise achievement.

Main Report

Achievement of students

Students' overall achievement is inadequate. Although there were some improvements in mathematics, results in 2011 in this subject remained well below average. Students' attainment in the subject is too low and the progress they make is not yet fast enough. Some difficulties stemming from amalgamation slowed improvement in mathematics initially and initiatives designed to raise achievement have not had enough impact. In three mathematics lessons observed, students made inadequate progress and in some others progress was not consistently fast enough to redress previous underachievement. Consequently, most groups of students, including those who are disabled, those with special educational needs and more-able students made less progress in mathematics than was achieved by their peers nationally. In English, results improved strongly in 2011 with the

result that most groups of students made satisfactory progress in this subject. This was also true for students known to be eligible for free school meals.

The strong improvement in English contributed well to a sharp rise in the proportion of students in 2011 gaining 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and mathematics. Nonetheless, students' overall attainment remains well below average due to the weaknesses in mathematics. In 2011, results in many subjects were in line with national averages at GCSE level, and some such as art and design and science were better than this. Results in design and technology and religious education were well below average.

Many students enter the academy with reading skills that are below average. A number of 'learning group' sessions at the start of the academy day are devoted to developing the reading skills of Year 7 students and this is improving their progress in reading, but inconsistencies in approach mean that some sessions are more effective than others.

Assessment information is used satisfactorily by teachers to enable students to know their targets and ensure that the learning needs of students who are disabled and those with special educational needs are met. However, data are not used routinely well enough to ensure that students, including the more able, are always set work in lessons that matches their differing abilities.

Most parents and carers consider that their children make good progress at the academy. Inspectors found that the progress of students in lessons varied with progress being much stronger in English, science and other subjects than in mathematics. Learning is at its best when teaching is imaginative and fast-paced, students are clear about what they have to do, activities match their interests and they are kept firmly on task. Where progress is slower, tasks are not always challenging enough, including for more-able students, and some low level misbehaviour is not tackled quickly enough.

Most students observed and spoken to during the inspection were interested in their learning. This interest was often highest amongst students in Key Stage 4 who felt that the options they were following matched their interests well. Students work particularly well together when asked to do so in lessons and this reflects the academy's strong focus on students' personal development and on encouraging good attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching

Although most parents and carers consider that teaching is good, inspectors found teaching to be satisfactory overall and improving. It is stronger in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Where it is most effective, teaching is lively and inattention is dealt with swiftly. Work is often challenging and a good range of strategies and resources are used to capture and hold students' attention. A good example of this was in a French lesson in Year 7, where both teacher and students used a colourful information and communication technology (ICT) program on the interactive whiteboard to demonstrate clearly the use of prepositions. This new knowledge was then strongly reinforced by different activities which students enjoyed.

Planning is detailed and takes account of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who receive good support with their learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and is used well to extend that of students. In a drama lesson, where students made outstanding progress, students enthused by their work readily asked their teacher high-level questions about the origins of the documentary dramas they were

studying. Questioning is often used well, both to hold students' attention and to check that they have understood their tasks. Books are generally well marked but some were unmarked. Most marking provides students with guidance about how to improve their work but some comments are too general to provide clear direction about the next steps to take. Grammatical errors and key words that are misspelt are not always identified and corrected. Where teaching is less effective or inadequate, such as in three of the eleven mathematics lessons observed, teachers talk too much and inattention or poor behaviour are not tackled promptly. In these lessons, students' work was not always marked in detail and expectations of standards of presentation or of the amount of work that should be completed by the end of a lesson were not high enough. Opportunities to engage students actively in their learning and discussion were missed.

In some lessons, there was an emphasis on developing basic literacy skills but there are few useful displays of key words around classrooms. Little use is made of students' mathematical skills in other subjects. There is inconsistency in the setting and quantity of homework students receive. In the best cases, this is frequent and linked directly to learning in class.

The good match of curriculum options to students' interests and good opportunities for using ICT, are increasing their engagement with and enjoyment of learning. This contributes well to students' satisfactory spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Effective teaching in a BTEC lesson in physical education enabled students to use information and communication technology proficiently. They prepared enthusiastically an electronic presentation to identify risks in a sport of their choice. In others lessons, students eagerly used handheld electronic devices to speed up their work.

Behaviour and safety of students

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the academy's sites is predominantly satisfactory and sometimes good. A minority of parents and carers raised concerns about learning in lessons being impeded by poor behaviour and inspectors found that this was the case in a few lessons due to the poor behaviour of a small minority of students. In some cases, this occurred during the split lunchtimes when students on their lunch break disturbed lessons taking place. Students spoken to by inspectors confirmed that they felt safe in the academy and that staff were approachable if they had any concerns. They considered that bullying was tackled quickly and firmly and behaviour was improving because of recent changes in how it is managed. These changes have made clearer the academy's expectations of behaviour and when sanctions will be invoked. Consequently, exclusions have declined. However, sanctions are not sufficiently well balanced by rewards. Training for staff, the judicious use of alternative teaching provision, the greater coordination of pastoral and support staff, and resources within the academy have aided this improvement. Attendance is below average but has improved well in all year groups since the start of this academic year. This is due to the effective work of new staff who deal with attendance, stronger links with parents and carers and students' greater engagement with their studies.

Leadership and management

Under the ambitious and determined leadership of the Principal, the academy has steadily developed. Improvements have been made to overall exam results, behaviour and the quality of teaching, although not all inadequate teaching has been eradicated. Staff are held to account through the effective use of performance management and many identified weaknesses in teaching have been tackled robustly. Training initiatives, such as the 'roots to

shoots' and the 'good to outstanding' teaching programme, have developed teachers' skills but they have had more impact in some departments than in others. Not all teachers who would benefit from these have been able to attend them. The quality of middle management is variable. Monitoring of departments' work by middle leaders is satisfactory as it is more effectively applied in some subjects than others. The academy's self-evaluation of its performance is accurate in many respects and leaders have a clear view of where it must improve. Development planning is satisfactory, although not enough priority has been given to the urgent need to improve mathematics. Many initiatives are at an early stage and there remain inconsistencies in how well some policies, such as the use of 'learning group' time, are applied.

Initiatives, such as the house and 'learning group' systems and a focus on students' personal development, have contributed well to the cohesiveness of the student population. Good links with primary schools and effective induction arrangements mean that new pupils settle in quickly. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They have increasing opportunities to be involved in the academy's development, such as being academy councillors and learning 'ambassadors'. They also have opportunities to contribute to the wider community, for example through charity fund raising. The academy has developed its links with parents and carers through newsletters, postcards home celebrating students' work, parents' and curriculum evenings. A regular parents' forum is also held where they can express their views. The large majority of parents and carers are supportive of the academy's work. However, a few raised concerns about communication with the academy.

Leaders and staff have worked hard to develop the satisfactory and improving curriculum. It focuses on the core subjects and the new three-year Key Stage 4 offers a wide range of options. The curriculum meets students' needs and interests and is increasing their engagement in learning. The curriculum also includes additional classes for students who have fallen behind in their learning in key subjects and effective alternative provision with external partners for subjects such as motor vehicle maintenance.

The governing body provides support to leaders but also a good level of challenge about students' academic and other outcomes. The academy promotes equal opportunities and any discrimination is tackled rigorously. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students comply with current requirements. The improvements in teaching, attendance, behaviour and in English show that the academy has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its students' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its students well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its students.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its students. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary school converters. Secondary schools include secondary school converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special school converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a student in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the students' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well students behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Students' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well students acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which students are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the students' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe students are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Students' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



27 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Furness Academy, Barrow-in-Furness, LA14 5QP

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we inspected your academy recently. We judged your academy to require a notice to improve because your achievement is not as good as it should be. The academy needs major improvement in mathematics so that you can learn more in this subject and make faster progress. Inspectors will revisit the academy to check on the progress it is making.

Some of the best things which we saw during the inspection were that:

- you work well together in classes
- you have made satisfactory progress in English
- the curriculum you follow is interesting and varied, particularly at Key Stage 4
- your behaviour and attendance are satisfactory overall and are improving
- you know well how to stay safe
- teaching is satisfactory and your academy is satisfactorily led and managed.

We have asked the Principal, staff and governors to make a number of improvements quickly. We have asked them to improve how mathematics is taught so that all of you make quicker progress and learn more. We have also asked them to ensure that policies and procedures, for example about how homework is set, are applied more consistently across the academy. We have also asked that the improvements in behaviour are sustained so that it becomes good. You can help by ensuring that you always follow rules about behaviour in lessons and around the academy sites, including at lunchtimes.

Once again, many thanks for being so welcoming and helpful when we inspected your academy.

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector

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