

# The Academy of St Francis of Assisi

Gardeners Drive, Liverpool, Merseyside, L6 7UR

## Inspection dates

14–15 November 2012

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Governors, the principal and senior leaders share the same vision and ambition to inspire their community through the achievements of their children. They have relentlessly and successfully pursued improvement in all aspects of this academy, including teaching and behaviour. Governors and senior leaders have considerable capacity to continue this improvement through an excellent understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses.
- Attainment has improved significantly and students achieve well. From very low standards students are now attaining at least in line with national averages, and sometimes exceed them.
- Students' personal development is nurtured through excellent care, an extensive range of enriching experiences and high expectations.
- Through the hard work of teachers and good leadership, the quality of teaching is improving rapidly and is now good with a significant proportion that is outstanding.
- Student attendance has improved from low to average. The rates of persistent absence have halved as have rates of exclusion. Students' behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Students are safe and feel secure.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- When students join the academy, their levels of literacy are low. The academy has been successful in raising literacy levels but recognises that more needs to be done to improve levels further before students embark on their Key Stage 4 courses.
- In the past, too few students had been able to take a wide range of good GCSEs, and the quality of teaching limited students achieving the highest GCSE grades. The curriculum has improved and teaching is improving rapidly, but the benefits have yet to be seen in firmly established high GCSE results.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors worked with senior staff while observing teaching and learning and reviewing work previously completed by students. Inspectors observed 31 lessons taught by 31 different teachers. Inspectors spoke to many students during breaks and lunch times, and during lessons.
- Inspectors observed activities taking place during form and registration time.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, senior leaders and with staff. A discussion was held with an external advisor on school improvement. Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including internal and external data about students' progress, school development planning, behaviour and attendance records and students' work. They investigated safeguarding procedures and records.
- When planning the inspection, there were six responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). A further two responses were made during the inspection and all were taken into account. Inspectors spoke to parents who were meeting their children after school.

## Inspection team

Neil MacKenzie, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Andrew Henderson	Additional Inspector
Michael Cooper	Additional Inspector
Chris Griffin	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Academy of St Francis of Assisi is an 11 to 16 joint church school sponsored by the Anglican Diocese and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool. It is not part of an academy chain. A half of the academy's students are Roman Catholics, others have a wide range of faiths, or none at all. Almost all live in the local community.
- The Academy is slightly smaller than the average-sized secondary school. More boys attend the academy than girls.
- Since the last full inspection, there have been significant changes to staff, particularly within the English and mathematics departments. Senior leadership has been restructured and two new vice-principals have been appointed.
- The academy has received national recognition from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust as one of the most improving schools in the country in terms of GCSE results.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is significantly higher than the national average.
- Students are predominantly of White British heritage with an increasing proportion from other backgrounds including those who are new to learning English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is similar to that found nationally. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is significantly above average.
- Fifteen students attend alternative provision to study engineering for part of their education at Liverpool Community College.
- The academy is a focal point for community education and is an adult learning centre.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy specialism is the environment and sustainability. Its work in this area has been acknowledged by Ofsted as an example of good practice.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise examination results even further by:
  - creating more opportunities for students to write extended, well considered texts where they can explain and justify their ideas, as required by the highest grades
  - further developing students confidence in learning without direct guidance from a teacher
  - ensuring the pace of activities provides opportunities to fully understand what they are learning and gain confidence
  - ensuring a more precise match of work to students' capabilities, particularly for the most able
  - extending the good practice that some teachers demonstrate in giving precise guidance to students on how to improve and provide students with the opportunity to act on this guidance.
- More rapidly develop and improve students' literacy skills by:
  - ensuring every teacher marks students' work with an eye to improving literacy
  - providing more opportunities to write at length right from the start of Year 7
  - extending the range of vocabulary that students use
  - extending personal reading and reviewing of a wide range of texts.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the academy with standards significantly lower than average. Historically, a fifth of students left without going on to further education, training or employment. The rapid improvement in examination results has resulted in this figure dropping to 3%. The numbers of students achieving five good GCSEs or equivalent have been significantly above average for two years, and numbers attaining five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, are approaching average.
- In the past, the numbers of students achieving the English Baccalaureate performance measure was low. However, these numbers are increasing rapidly.
- Rates of progress in English and mathematics are also rapidly improving as evidenced in lessons observed during the inspection.
- The academy considers the needs of individual students before making the decision whether to enter them early for particular examinations. Teaching sets are reorganised regularly and students' final GCSE grades are not limited by the early sitting of examinations.
- Results in science, religious education, drama, physical education and in design and technology have been good for some time.
- Most of those parents who responded on Parent View, and all spoken to, agree that their children make good progress.
- Due to the excellent quality of additional support and care, the achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is at least good and sometimes outstanding. Similar care and attention is given to those who join the school, and particularly for those who are learning to speak English as an additional language. These students integrate very quickly and make equally good progress. All students have equal opportunities to learn and improve.
- As a result of well targeted use of additional funding, the average examination results and progress for those students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, are improving. Gaps between how well this group are achieving and others within the school are closing.
- A few students have recently started to attend an off-site course in engineering. The academy's robust monitoring systems show that their progress is good.
- Students' literacy and numeracy skills are improving. The academy is not complacent however, and has recently altered the way in which literacy skills in particular are being developed. Not all staff use the new strategy equally well and so the practice is currently inconsistent.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and has improved because across the academy there is a passion to raise achievement and a clear understanding of how to develop students' learning.
- Where teaching is outstanding, teachers very effectively combine their excellent subject knowledge with a very clear understanding of how students learn. As a result they plan well, systematically building students' understanding and confidence. They question well to help students get a firm grasp of what they have to understand. These teachers give excellent advice to students on how to improve. They also know the needs of individuals in their group and adapt work to match those needs.
- Where teaching requires improvement, teachers will often misjudge the pace of the lesson. Sometimes they do not give students sufficient time to reflect on their work or to discuss it without direct guidance from the teacher. This leads to students having only a superficial understanding of the topic. Teachers underestimate the potential of students and accept purely factual answers, missing opportunities to ask students to explain or justify their answers or opinions. This limits students from being able to demonstrate the skills needed to achieve the highest grades in examinations. Students are not always given the opportunity to extend their

vocabulary.

- As a result of the strong culture of care and inclusion, staff are determined to find solutions to any problems that prevent students progressing well. Consequently, students develop confidence and self-belief. Many students who, in the past, have found difficulty integrating in school, now work well in classes, enjoy school and are justifiably proud of their achievements.
- The academy has an improved system of marking and assessment. This is done regularly by staff and often well. However, when it is not effective, teachers simply give comments that congratulate the student, missing the important step of explaining what students have to do to achieve the next grade. When teachers do give this advice, there are too few occasions where students are given opportunities to act on it through redrafting and improving their work.
- The academy has also improved its approach to develop students' literacy skills. Where teachers apply the principles systematically and consistently, improvement is seen. Where students are withdrawn from classes to improve reading, they progress well.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- There is a positive culture for learning within the academy. There is little low-level disruption within classes. Around the school students are happy, well-mannered and generally calm.
- Older students told inspectors that in the past, behaviour was not as good. They say the academy is now 'stricter' but are pleased about this as they say, 'we learn better'.
- Students say that when bullying does occur, or there are disagreements, 'it gets resolved'. Many students commented on how secure they feel within the academy and appreciate the safe environment it provides. Students are taught how to recognise all forms of bullying and how to respond to it. All students felt there were many adults, including the principal, they could turn to for advice and support.
- Academy staff have a strong sense of team work dedicated to achieving better opportunities for their students. The numbers of students who are excluded have reduced significantly. One girl who had moved to this school because, 'she was always in trouble' said that, 'I've been great here.' and gave the school 11 out of 10!
- Excellent guidance and advice is given to students in both the reconciliation centre and the Assisi centre. For example, a group of students attending sessions supported by the Home Office, listened silently to a mother explaining how she felt when her daughter was murdered. The resulting discussion with the visitor explored wide ranging issues and left the students reflecting on the impact of crime and what they can do to improve their community.
- The academy also makes considerable and successful efforts to work with parents, even those who are difficult to reach.
- As a result of a determined effort by staff, students enjoy being at school and believe it has something valuable to offer them; attendance rates have improved significantly from low to the national average.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The governors and academy leadership have an aspiration for their students to become ambassadors of their community. They have raised academic standards and provide an extensive range of opportunities and experiences for students to extend their personal development. Running through the core of the academy is a belief that they have a duty to serve their local community through care and compassion. Although a Christian faith-based academy, students from different cultural backgrounds, other faiths or no faith are welcomed, respected and valued. It is a highly cohesive organisation where there is no discrimination. When inspectors asked one Year 11 student what changes he had seen, he said 'Changes? The improvement has been massive.'
- Students' personal growth is a priority and every aspect of the academy's work enhances

students' exceptional spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is an excellent range of enriching experiences because the school systematically analyses the needs and ambitions of their students and seeks opportunities to provide for them

- Academy staff and leaders have developed expectations of teachers and effective strategies to support students' learning. There is an extensive programme of professional development and staff appreciate its high quality. Teachers' performance is monitored closely, and when teachers are unable to meet expectations, they are given additional support. The quality of support and the genuine desire to help teachers improve is highly valued by individual staff. Academy leaders and governors take more decisive action if teachers fail to reach expected standards. All leaders also monitor the progress of students rigorously and frequently.
- Two years ago, very few students left with five good passes in academic GCSEs. However, the academy leadership team has improved the curriculum that is offered to older students and, this year, about half of those starting their Key Stage 4 courses have the opportunity to achieve in this way. In addition, there is a good range of non academic and vocational courses. The curriculum offers a good match to the abilities and aspirations of the students.
- The principal actively seeks external guidance. Rather than relying on a single source, he utilises a range of experienced professionals, all of whom give good advice and support.
- All leaders and managers are fully aware that the proportions of students achieving consistently well in GCSEs courses are not yet high enough to demonstrate outstanding achievement.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Most of the academy governors live locally and realise the academy's potential to drive regeneration. Governors have a very full understanding of effectiveness of every significant aspect of the school, including how effectively pupil-premium funding is allocated. They have excellent experience in leadership within the educational sector and in industry. Their values are reflected in the caring ethos of the academy but what drives them is raising student achievement. Therefore they, very effectively, hold the principal to account and by extension the academy staff.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	101857
<b>Local authority</b>	Liverpool
<b>Inspection number</b>	404786

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	818
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Alcock
<b>Headteacher</b>	Dermot McNiffe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 December 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 260 7600
<b>Fax number</b>	Not applicable
<b>Email address</b>	info@asfaonline.org



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