

North Liverpool Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131065
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	334533
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham 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 pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1150
Sixth form	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nigel Ward
Principal	Mrs Kay Askew
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	Priory Road Liverpool Merseyside L4 2SL
Telephone number	0151 2604044
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

The academy is larger than most secondary schools. It is situated in a very disadvantaged area of the city. A very high proportion of students is eligible for free school meals. There are more boys than girls in many year groups and this is particularly the case in Years 7 and 8. The proportion of students identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very high but the proportion of students with a statement of their special educational need is below average. Nearly a quarter of students are from minority ethnic groups but very few students are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The specialisms are business and enterprise and mathematics and computing. The academy has the Healthy School Award, Becta Mark, Customer Service Excellence Mark (Charter Mark) and the Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 2

North Liverpool Academy is a good school. Its progress in the last three years shows what can be achieved with the right blend of skill, energy and determination. The principal and Chair of Governors are exceptional leaders. They are well supported by the vice principals and other governors. The senior team are ambitious and unwilling to compromise. They take well-managed and carefully considered risks and are highly evaluative. They find creative solutions to challenges and obstacles and have developed a staff team who share their optimistic and ambitious vision for the academy and the local community. Their vision is combined with exceptionally rigorous attention to detail so no aspect of the overall plan is neglected and no opportunity to consolidate or reinforce students' personal development is overlooked. The commitment and hard work of this small team has helped the academy to make good and often very good progress in nearly all aspects of its development.

Students are very well cared for and supported. The academy is a safe and secure environment and students say that there is very little bullying or unpleasantness. However, as some students admitted during the inspection they are not all 'angels' and their outstanding behaviour and very good attitudes to learning are the result of carefully managed support from staff and because the academy makes the most of every opportunity to encourage, interest and motivate them. A secure, confidential helpline deals effectively and sensitively with any concerns which might arise and the academy's procedures to keep students safe are very effective.

Students thrive in this positive atmosphere. Achievement is good and although standards are broadly in-line with the national average they are improving rapidly, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The curriculum is outstanding. It has been exceptionally well planned to meet the needs of all students. Students say that they joined the academy because of the opportunities it provides. They believe that they can achieve well and that they can succeed in all they do and even the youngest students have high and achievable ambitions for their future. Students of all ages talk openly and proudly of their achievements and they share a common understanding that success is positive and desirable. They encourage each other and are proud of their achievements.

Most teaching is good and it is often outstanding. Staff have benefited from very good training and development and clear guidance as to what is expected. In the best lessons teachers focus on students' learning. They provide interesting and challenging tasks which help students to develop independent learning skills, teamwork and the ability to explain their ideas and opinions. Students make good progress in nearly all lessons. However, in the lessons which were satisfactory rather than good tasks were not sufficiently well matched to the needs of some students so they found tasks too difficult or were not challenged enough. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress as well as their peers in lessons because they are fully included and are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants. However, although the academy provides well for students with a statement of their special educational need or those with very specific difficulties its management of the provision made for students with less serious needs is not effective enough. Teachers do not routinely plan the small steps which will help them make progress and, as a result, senior staff cannot be sure that this group achieve sufficiently well.

The academy provides good value for money. It has outstanding capacity to improve further because teaching is effective, students are gaining the skills and attitudes needed for lifelong

learning and leadership is developing at all levels. The academy has very effective partnerships with a range of other agencies and institutions. It knows and works with the local community exceptionally well and it is making a very good contribution to the regeneration of the area.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

'I was naughty 2 when I came here they pointed me in the right direction and I ran all the way to university.' This is a comment made by a student when he met an inspector by chance in a corridor and it exemplifies the strength of the care, guidance and support provided for students. The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding and it is this which is helping students to make the gains in attainment, confidence and self-belief which are improving their life chances. Most A-level students join the sixth form with a below average GCSE profile. They make very good progress because teaching is at least good and a high proportion is outstanding. Induction procedures are very thorough and the tutorial system provides excellent individual support. Each student's progress is carefully reviewed and intensive mentoring is provided if needed. As a result achievement is outstanding and standards are good and improving. A broad and well balanced curriculum is enhanced by the collaboration with two local schools. The vast majority of students are now enrolled on level 3 courses which include a choice of 20 GCE AS and A levels and vocational and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses. The small cohort following level 1 and level 2 courses all gain passes and make good progress. Pass rates for GCE AS and A levels and vocational A-level courses have improved each year. In 2008 the GCE A-level pass rate was 99% with all but one course achieving a 100%. GCE AS pass rates are also above the national average although the academy knows that it must improve the proportion attaining the highest grades in some courses. Students are enthused and inspired by their time in the sixth form and show excellent maturity and commitment to their studies. The proportion of students going on to further and higher education is increasing. Sixty-five students will go on to university in 2009 and most will be the first members of their family to do so.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Ensure that the tasks provided for students are accurately matched to their needs and ability.
- Improve the leadership and management of special educational needs to ensure that students' needs are identified correctly and that teachers plan the small steps in their education and monitor the progress they make.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry is below average and although the academy admits students of all abilities many have weaknesses in their basic skills or have difficulty in explaining their thoughts or ideas orally or in writing. Students achieve well. They make good progress in both key stages because they develop good learning skills and because the academy provides a great deal of support and tackles underachievement effectively. Standards are average. They are rising at both key stages but more rapidly at Key Stage 4. Students embark on Key Stage 4 studies in Year 9 and acquire a large number of GCSE, BTEC and basic and key skills qualifications during the three years. Many of these are GCSE passes or the equivalent at A* to C grades. This motivates students and encourages them to attend regularly and continue their studies. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE passes increased significantly in 2008 to

76% and the academy is anticipating that 90% of students will attain five or more passes this summer. This figure is high. However, there is scope to improve the proportion attaining the highest A* to A grades. In 2008 only 36% of students attained five or more good grades including English and mathematics, this was 10% more than the previous year but the figure remained below the national average. Almost all of the current Year 11 students will gain a qualification in English or mathematics and very few will leave the academy without qualifications. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their peers because they are well supported in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Students thoroughly enjoy their education and they appreciate all that the academy offers. The proportion of students excluded from the academy has declined significantly this year and attendance is rising. The proportion of students who are persistent non-attenders has also declined significantly and is now broadly in-line with the national average. Most students prefer being in school. They are very committed to the academy and they are proud to wear their uniform. They are particularly keen to explain the significance of different coloured ties and the responsibilities that they represent. Students learn to live healthy lifestyles and they develop self-confidence and a belief in themselves. They learn to make sensible choices and decisions and to get long with others and work as part of a team. Their behaviour in lessons and their attitudes to learning are excellent. They are proud of their achievements and quick to praise the success of others. They develop enterprise and workplace skills and learn to organise and manage their finances: this prepares them exceptionally well for their future lives. Students take good care of each other. The youngest students say that older students try to help them if they have a problem. Students respect each other. They evaluate the work of their peers fairly using agreed criteria and offering tactful feedback. Students appreciate the help they receive. One student said, 'Teachers do not tell you what you cannot do, they tell you what you can do to get better.' Another said, 'This is not the teachers' school, it is our school.' This typifies attitudes and relationships within the academy. Students participate fully in events and activities and they work with staff because they recognise and appreciate the impact that the academy is having on their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall and a significant amount is outstanding. Teachers have received very good support and guidance and this has resulted in consistent approaches and expectations in all subjects and year groups. Students know what is expected of them and they conform to exacting demands because they know it is in their interests to do so. Lessons are exciting and engaging. In most lessons teacher talk is brief and the focus is on what and how students will learn. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace because teachers use a variety of methods and approaches. Students work as part of a group or with a partner and they learn to listen to each other, organise and plan tasks and combine information from a variety of sources. The 'lead learners' make a very strong contribution to lessons. The role is valued by other students and helps the lead learner to consolidate his or her own skills. Most students are fully engaged in lessons and because they enjoy learning very few misbehave or waste time. However, in a small number of

lessons students do not progress as well because everyone in the class is given the same task and some students lack the skills needed to complete it successfully or find it too easy. The academy's systems to assess students and track their progress are effective and most teachers encourage students to evaluate their own work and that of their peers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very well matched to students' needs and interests. There is a very good programme of induction activities for students who join the academy in Year 7 and students say that this helps them settle in very easily. The Key Stage 3 curriculum helps them to develop effective learning skills and to achieve, whatever their starting point. At Key Stage 4 students are tactfully guided in to appropriate pathways which provide coherent routes to further study at Key Stage 5. All pathways offer a mix of vocational courses and some GCSEs and this ensures that students enjoy their education and achieve well. There are wealth of strategies to tackle underachievement and an almost equal number which promote the attainment of the most able or help students to develop their talents or interests. The activities which promote students' personal development are exceptionally well thought out. The academy has very strong partnerships with many agencies and institutions and these enhance students' lives and encourage them to aim high. There are a huge number of enrichment activities and visits and visitors. The academy's well established business and enterprise specialism is making a significant impact on students' personal lives and contributes positively to their attainment. The more recent mathematics and computing specialism is leading developments in new courses and approaches to teaching and learning in mathematics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support provided for students are outstanding. Staff at all levels are deeply committed to students' well-being. They know students well and provide exceptionally good emotional, personal and practical support. The academy helps students to widen their horizons and ensures that they develop good habits and positive behaviours. Students particularly value 'dads and lads' which is designed to motivate boys and their parents or friends, despite the name girls were allowed to attend, and 'pink and powerful' which provides girls with the opportunity to meet strong female role models. As a result of this very good support the proportion of students not in education, employment or training at the end of Years 11 and 13 has declined and is below the local average. The academy provides students with effective moral and social guidance, and procedures to assess and track their progress are secure. Students with the most significant learning needs and those with social, emotional or behavioural problems receive effective support but procedures to identify, plan for and measure the progress of students with less significant but important needs are not rigorous enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership of the principal and the Chair of Governors is outstanding. Their ambitious vision for the academy has been realised through the effort and skills of the small but skilled senior leadership team. The vice principals and assistant vice principals carry out their responsibilities effectively and together the senior team and governors provide clear direction and ensure that

students are provided with the best possible opportunities. Leadership is developing at all levels and there is effective working within and between faculties and departments. Staff learn from each other, for example, the 'emerging leaders', a group of staff new to teaching, play an important part in sharing skills and research with more experienced colleagues. However, although the academy is very inclusive it does not manage the provision made for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities effectively enough.

The academy's self-evaluation is accurate. The leadership team keep a regular and rigorous eye on outcomes and regularly seek the views of students and their families. Students and staff judge their own progress and that of their peers and actively look for feedback, which helps them to improve further. The academy has established a robust culture and change is seen as desirable and helpful. Staff are confident and have adapted well to new ways of working. The academy tackles inequality and discrimination within its own community and in the wider area. The principal and governors have made the most of the opportunities provided by the new building, which is due to be completed before the end of the summer term. Its design reinforces the academy's ethos and facilitates new ways of working. Its position, looking out over the city and towards the world beyond exemplifies the academy's ambition for its students and the wider community.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	IE ²
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	IE ²
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	IE ²

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for being so welcoming when I visited the academy with the inspection team. We enjoyed meeting you, seeing you at work and listening to your views. We could see that you enjoy your education and that you appreciate all that is done for you. You make the most of your education, gaining qualifications and developing your talents and skills. We were particularly pleased to see how much you value achievement and how well you praise and support other students when they do well. Some aspects of the academy are outstanding and those aspects are really making a difference. The curriculum is excellent. It is interesting and very well matched to your needs. This means that you enjoy learning and achieve well. The sixth form is also outstanding, so students in the sixth form do well and other students want to join it.

You are very well cared for and supported and the staff do all they can to help you feel included and valued. However, although teaching is generally good and sometimes outstanding there are a few lessons which are not as good because you are all given the same tasks. This means that some people find the work too difficult and others find it too easy. We have asked Mrs Askew to ensure that you all receive work that is exactly matched to your ability. Although the academy includes all students it does not always plan well enough for all of the students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. We have asked the academy to improve the leadership and management of this aspect of its work so that it can be sure that you are all progressing as well as you possibly can.

We thought that your behaviour and your attitude in lessons were excellent. It was good to hear that you all try to help each other. We were very pleased to see how well you evaluate your own work and that of others and how kind and tactful you are, particularly when some people are not doing quite as well as others. The academy is a happy and purposeful place but this has not come about by accident. Mrs Askew and the governors have worked very hard to make it happen and they have been very well supported by the other staff and by the leadership team. Their hard work and determination have ensured that you make the most of your education and that you are well prepared for your future lives.

We hope that you enjoy the end of term and have a lovely holiday.