

St George's School

Sun Lane, Harpenden, AL5 4TD

Inspection dates 10–11 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- St George's School provides an outstanding education for its students.
- In 2013, the proportion of Year 11 students who achieved five or more good GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was well above average. A similarly high proportion of students achieved this in 2014.
- Students of all abilities and from all backgrounds make rapid progress in many subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Achievement in mathematics is particularly strong. The vast majority of students make excellent progress and achieve high standards in all year groups.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of all students and use assessment information effectively to make sure they are working at the highest possible level.
- Students behave exceptionally well in class and around the academy. They are polite, well-mannered and courteous, dress smartly and wear their uniform with pride.
- Students feel safe at the academy and have a strong understanding of safety matters.
- The vast majority of students work hard and have outstanding attitudes to learning. They are highly motivated to achieve well. Relationships are excellent across the whole academy.
- Students enjoy an exciting and stimulating curriculum. A diverse range of additional activities helps them to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding extremely well.
- The headteacher's high expectations of all staff and students, shared by all leaders, are an important reason why achievement continues to be outstanding.
- Subject leaders are skilful in making sure that achievement, teaching and behaviour and safety are of a high standard.
- The governing body is highly influential in the academy's success. Its members are knowledgeable and provide an excellent level of support and challenge.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Leaders have an excellent impact on achievement, teaching and behaviour. Students make rapid progress and attain high standards at the end of Years 12 and 13.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 30 lessons, nine of which were jointly observed with senior leaders. The inspection team also made several short visits to other lessons to check on the progress and behaviour of different groups of students.
- Meetings were held with five groups of students from all year groups. Other meetings were held with members of the governing body and with senior leaders and staff, including those responsible for leading subjects.
- Inspectors analysed the 356 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors observed the work of the academy and looked at a number of documents, including those relating to the monitoring of teaching and the targets set for teachers to improve their work. They also looked at records relating to attendance, behaviour, bullying and safeguarding, the academy's improvement plan and data on students' progress.

Inspection team

Richard Sutton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Additional Inspector
Susan Bullen	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
Ann Short	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is below average.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported through the pupil premium, which is additional funding given to schools for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is significantly lower than the national average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy does not use any alternative provision for students.
- A very small number of sixth form students study some courses at Sir John Lawes School and Roundwood Park School.
- St George's School has boarding provision. Currently there are 101 students who board at the school. The boarding provision is inspected separately.
- St George's School converted to become an academy school on 1 July 2012. When its predecessor school, also called St George's School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of senior leaders on students' achievement and the quality of teaching by:
 - reviewing the effectiveness of subject departments more frequently so that any inconsistencies are quickly identified, particularly in teachers' marking and feedback to students.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher, extremely well supported by senior, subject and house leaders, has successfully ensured that all staff have high expectations of themselves and others. Many students also have high expectations of themselves. This contributes significantly to outstanding teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety and attitudes to learning. As a result, St George's is a thriving and cohesive learning community. The academy is well placed to continue to improve further because leaders have demonstrated their excellent ability to sustain high achievement since it opened.
- Leaders have an accurate and detailed understanding of the academy's strengths and of areas that require further improvement because they regularly check teaching and use assessment information to monitor the progress that all students are making. This information is shared with parents regularly through helpful reports that enable parents and students to identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Subject leaders have a good understanding of their subject areas. They have good skills which support them in checking how good teaching, achievement and behaviour are in their areas. Subject leaders value the training opportunities they are regularly given, which ensure they are well equipped to continuously improve teaching and achievement.
- As the government no longer requires schools to assess Key Stage 3 students using national curriculum levels, leaders are working towards developing their own system of assessment with other schools in the area. Until this is fully developed, the academy is continuing to assess students using national curriculum levels.
- Students are taught in ability and mixed-ability groups, depending on the subject. This approach helps most students, including the most and least able students, to make excellent progress in many subjects. The curriculum is well matched to students' interests and abilities. It is made more exciting through, for example, a wide range of very well led house activities and additional activities and visits which help students to develop skills in teamwork, leadership and responsibility. The 'Friday 5' sessions provide students with a wealth of additional learning opportunities such as debates around topical issues, opportunities to learn about other cultures, citizenship and issues which relate to life in modern Britain. All these activities help students to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding very well.
- The targets set for teachers to help them improve their work and guide decisions about pay increases are effective. They make a good contribution to outstanding achievement and teaching.
- Students in Years 8 to 13 receive very good independent advice and guidance regarding their future careers. Older students benefit from excellent support to help them to make informed decisions about examination subject choices, as well as the opportunities available to students in further and higher education, employment and training.
- Leaders review the effectiveness of departments in addition to their regular checks on achievement and teaching. However, these reviews are not frequent enough. This means that occasional inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and achievement, particularly with respect to how teacher's marking and feedback helps students to improve their work, are not always identified and improved as quickly as they could be.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a detailed and accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for further development. Governors are skilled in the interpretation of students' achievement data and they provide an excellent level of support and challenge to the academy.
 - The governing body carries out its statutory duties fully. For example, governors ensure that the academy fulfils statutory responsibilities regarding safeguarding: appropriate checks are in place for visitors to the academy, all staff have been checked as required and are trained to keep students safe and free from harm.

- The curriculum is monitored effectively by the governing body to ensure that students develop tolerance and respect for people of different cultures and faiths as well as preparing students very well to take their place in modern Britain.
- Governors know how the additional pupil premium and Year 7 'catch up' funding is used. Governors are aware of the good impact that this funding has on eligible students because they check this regularly.
- Governors know about the quality of teaching and the management of staff performance, and they are appropriately involved in making decisions about whether teachers should receive pay rises in relation to meeting their targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. The vast majority of students behave exceptionally well in class and around the academy. Students are polite, well-mannered and courteous. They dress smartly and wear their uniform with pride. Students show a high level of respect towards each other and staff. Students also respect the school environment; the site is tidy and free from litter.
- Flourishing relationships across the academy make a significant contribution to the outstanding learning. Consequently, the vast majority of students have outstanding attitudes to learning.
- Sixth form students model outstanding behaviour very well for younger students. They enjoy the numerous responsibilities which they are given and also model outstanding attitudes to learning.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire agree that the academy makes sure that students behave well. The overwhelming majority of staff who responded to the questionnaire also agree.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students, including those in the sixth form, have a strong understanding of safety matters, including how to keep safe when working online and the risks associated with extremism, for example.
- Bullying is rare and as a result, students feel safe at the academy. Students are taught about the different forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying, and they are well equipped to manage such situations should they arise.
- Exclusions from the academy are low. This reflects the positive attitudes to learning that the vast majority of students have.
- Students arrive punctually to lessons and they are well prepared with the appropriate equipment.
- Attendance is average. The proportion of students who miss school regularly is much lower than it is nationally and improving strongly.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Since the academy opened, students have benefited from teaching which is outstanding in many subjects and never less than good. This is the main reason why students achieve high standards and make rapid progress across the curriculum.
- Teachers have high expectations of all students' effort and progress. Consequently, work is appropriately challenging, including for disabled students and those who have special educational needs and students who speak English as an additional language, because teachers skilfully use assessment information to set work at the right level. For example, during lessons, teachers regularly check the progress of students and change or adapt the work if any students are finding it too easy or too difficult.
- Teaching for the most able students is well matched to their skills and abilities. Work is challenging and they are expected to use their initiative and work at an appropriately fast pace. Teachers also make sure

that these students are appropriately challenged by the use of effective questions which require them to think hard.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs benefit from well-focused support from teachers and teaching assistants, when it is needed. This is complemented by good additional support for some students who work in the learning support department for some of their time.
- Teaching assistants provide good support to the students they work with because they have a detailed and accurate understanding of the students' particular learning needs.
- Teachers have a good understanding of the subjects that they teach and they also have a detailed understanding of the examination requirements. As a result, teachers' marking and written feedback are usually helpful because they often offer precise and clear advice on how students can improve their work and move to the next level or grade. However, occasionally the quality is not as helpful as it should be when it does not show students how to improve their work.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Since the academy opened, the proportion of Year 11 students who have achieved five or more GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been much higher than average. Students typically join Year 7 with attainment which is well above average and they make rapid progress across a wide range of subjects.
- The proportion of Year 11 students who make the progress expected nationally in English and mathematics is much higher than average. In addition, the proportion who exceed this expectation in both subjects is much higher. Achievement in mathematics in all year groups and for all students is consistently outstanding and never less than good.
- The vast majority of students, including those who speak English as an additional language, the most able and students from ethnic minority backgrounds, make rapid progress in most subjects. This is because all staff have high expectations of all students.
- The most able students achieve their full potential because they attain the highest grades in many subjects.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make at least consistently good progress. In some subjects they make more rapid progress because teachers and teaching assistants make sure that there is a good balance between the difficulty of the work and the support that is given.
- The proportion of students who are supported through the additional pupil premium funding is very small. The academy spends the funding effectively by providing additional staff who offer one-to-one academic or personal support when it is needed. As a result, disadvantaged students are making rapid progress, similar to other students, across all year groups. In 2014, those in Year 11 achieved results that were, on average, a third of a grade lower in English and almost half a grade lower in mathematics than other students in the academy. It is not valid to compare this to the previous year because there were fewer than five disadvantaged students in Year 11. Compared to all students nationally in 2013 (as no 2014 national data was available at the time of the inspection), Year 11 students achieved almost a grade higher in English and one and a half grades higher in mathematics.
- A very small number of students are supported by additional Year 7 'catch-up' funding, which helps those who join the academy with attainment below the expected level in English and mathematics. The academy uses this funding effectively to provide small group reading, spelling and mathematics classes. Students are catching up as a result, though progress is much faster in mathematics than it is in English.
- The academy does not enter students early for GCSE examinations. Consequently, students are able to have the full amount of time to study these courses. This is a good strategy because students achieve high standards.

The sixth form provision**is outstanding**

- Students join the sixth form with attainment which is above average. The majority, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs and the very small proportion who are disadvantaged, make rapid progress and attainment is higher than average. The most able students make rapid progress and reach their full potential as the majority of them achieve the highest grades at both AS and A level. This is above average and improving as a result, achievement in the sixth form is outstanding.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Teachers have expert knowledge about the subjects that they teach. They skilfully help students to constantly strive for higher grades because they use the information that they have about examination requirements exceptionally well to help students understand what is required to improve.
- As well as making sure that achievement, teaching and behaviour and safety are outstanding, leaders have also developed a curriculum which is accurately matched to the interests and career goals of students. All students follow study programmes which lead to academic qualifications and there is very good support for the small number of students who have not achieved a grade C or higher in English and mathematics. Year 12 students take part in work experience and all sixth form students have opportunities to develop their leadership qualities as well as employability skills through the wide range of 'Friday 5' activities and extra-curricular activities.
- Students receive outstanding independent advice and guidance to help them make informed choices about the subjects they study in the sixth form as well as their future careers. The impact of this is that almost all students remain on their courses for the full two years and almost all move on to higher education or employment with training.

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

Unique reference number	138356
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	449205

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	1327
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	390
Number of boarders on roll	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Parsons
Headteacher	Raymond McGovern
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2007
Telephone number	01582 765477
Fax number	01582 469830
Email address	admin@stgeorges.herts.sch.uk

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