

# Stone Soup Academy

14 High Pavement, Nottingham, NG1 1HN

## Inspection dates

7–8 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- In the short time that students attend the academy, their achievement improves from poor to outstanding.
- Students gain qualifications and work-related skills that prepare them well for the future. Last year, almost all students who left the academy went into education, employment or training.
- Students' progress is exceptional in studies related to music, media, design and technology.
- Students make very rapid progress in improving their behaviour and attitudes to work and these are now good.
- There is little disruption to lessons or to the academy's calm atmosphere as there is hardly any poor behaviour.
- The behaviour and safety of students is monitored continuously. Action is taken immediately if there is any concern.
- Relationships amongst students and between students and staff are excellent.
- The quality of teaching and the curriculum is outstanding. Work is closely matched to students' interests and what they need for life after the academy. The students are therefore strongly motivated to learn.
- Students enjoy coming to the academy. As a result, their attendance is improving rapidly although it is still below the average for all schools.
- The partnership with parents is outstanding. The academy keeps them fully up-to-date on their children's progress and how they can best provide support.
- The academy has created an excellent website which students use to extend their learning in English, mathematics and other subjects when not in the academy.
- The academy's approach to nurturing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.
- An important reason for students' outstanding achievement is the headteacher's very effective methods for developing the teaching skills of all staff.
- The driving force for the academy's success is the shared commitment of the governing body and academy leaders to get young people who have become severely disaffected with schooling back into learning.
- The staff fully support this vision and they work extremely hard to improve students' outcomes.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out eight lesson observations. In two of these, he was accompanied by the headteacher.
- During lesson observations, the inspector talked to students about their work and heard them reading.
- The inspector held discussions with the Principal, the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, members of the student engagement team and a group of students.
- The inspector read documents relating to school self-evaluation, students' progress, the monitoring of teaching, improvement planning and students' behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. The inspector also analysed students' work in a selection of their books.
- The inspector took account of the responses to an inspection questionnaire returned by 19 staff. The online survey, Parent View, was not available to parents for this inspection. The inspector took account, however, of questionnaires completed by 11 parents and carers as part of a recent survey conducted by the academy.

## Inspection team

John Rutherford, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This academy free school provides a curriculum specifically designed for secondary school students who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream school or who are at risk of permanent exclusion because of their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. This is known as an 'alternative provision'.
- The school provides places for 40 students. There are currently 33 students on roll in Years 10 and 11. Students start and leave at all times of the school year. Some return to their mainstream (commissioning) school because their behaviour has sufficiently improved. Typically, students attend the academy for around 20 weeks.
- Students start at the academy following a period of significant disruption to their education.
- Around half of the students come from Nottingham City local authority. The others come from the neighbouring Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Derby City local authorities. Many students live a considerable distance from the school.
- Currently, half of the students are known to be eligible for free school meals and a quarter are in local authority care. These figures are above the national average. The academy does not receive pupil premium funding for these students. (The pupil premium is extra money provided by the government for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and those with a parent in the armed forces).
- A fifth of the students are from a minority ethnic background, which is broadly in line with the national average.
- Almost all students are supported at school action plus, which indicates that they require support additional to that which can be provided by their mainstream school. The students' needs relate to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The support for a small minority of students is identified in a statement of special educational needs because their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are combined with significant learning difficulties.
- The academy opened in September 2012. It was established by the Stone Soup Project, a community interest company whose aims include enhancing the life-chances of young people in vulnerable circumstances by improving their education, care and preparation for employment.
- During its first term, the governing body were required to make significant changes to the senior leadership structure then, after two terms, the academy moved to its present address.
- The academy is led by a Principal who has a background in care services and a headteacher who is also an advanced skills teacher. The Principal is a director of the Stone Soup Project.
- Many of the staff have previously worked outside education in such areas as music, media, clothing design and carpentry. They are trained to teach while working in the academy and they are given the opportunity to work towards the Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills award.
- The academy works in close partnership with local colleges and is a member of a teaching school alliance whose aim is the improvement of teachers' skills in its member schools.

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

- To improve students' qualifications, the academy should broaden its provision of GCSE courses by extending its partnership with other schools.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- The academy successfully transforms the achievement of its students after they re-engage with education. 'Everybody learns here' is the reason given by a group of students for their motivation to work hard and achieve well. The inspection evidence supports their view.
- Within a very short time of starting at the academy, students' progress improves from poor to above average in reading, writing, mathematics, music and creative crafts.
- The majority of students who left last year gained level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics, which are equivalent to GCSE grades. This year, school records and students' work show that a greater proportion of students are achieving at this level and some will be entered for GCSE examinations.
- Students successfully apply their literacy and numeracy skills in a range of contexts, for example, writing songs or film scripts and calculating the finances related to marketing the clothes they have designed.
- Because work is so well matched to each student's needs, those who were eligible for pupil premium in their mainstream schools and those from minority ethnic backgrounds make the same rapid progress as other students.
- Students with significant learning difficulties achieve well because of the quality of the one-to-one support they receive. Where staff do not have the specific skills to provide the support required, the academy commissions it from external support services.
- More-able students are stretched by additional challenge in lessons and through challenging projects linked to film-making or music composition, in which they do very well.
- The views of all parents who returned an academy questionnaire believe that their children are making exceptional progress. This matches the inspection evidence.

### The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is directly relevant to students' interests and future hopes. As a result, they achieve well in such tasks as writing a job application, calculating budgets and using advanced computer programmes to compose music.
- There is outstanding teaching in English grammar and poetry. This is because the teacher combines rigour in learning with fun and constantly relates the work to pupils' experience and interests.
- Teachers plan their lessons based on detailed information about each student's needs. Each student, therefore, works at the right level of challenge and this accelerates their progress.
- Teachers constantly check students' work, giving them guidance which helps them to achieve higher levels. This is particularly effective when the guidance is in the form of a video conversation which sets each student a clear target for the next lesson.

- Marking in many subjects is excellent, giving students very clear instructions on how to improve their work.
- Teachers extend students' learning skills by challenging them to take responsibility for aspects of their work. In a mathematics lesson, for example, students designed their own imaginative approaches to presenting data on a graph.
- Teachers use encouragement, conversation and appropriate humour to create an excellent climate for learning in lessons. This helps students to stay focused on their work and to accelerate their progress.
- Each day starts with a morning focus during which teachers and students typically discuss a short film on issues relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Recent examples include how it makes you feel to give something away and why you should take care in judging others by what they wear. All teachers then reinforce the key points of the focus in their lessons and, as students told the inspector, 'you are learning without noticing'. This makes an excellent contribution to their personal and social development.
- All the parents who returned an academy questionnaire were very positive about the quality of teaching their children received; their views support the inspection judgement.

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

- A parent who contacted the inspector summed up the very positive views of those who completed an academy questionnaire when she wrote; 'Stone Soup got my child back into education when she was withdrawn, angry and confused. The academy's approach is positive praise and a caring environment that encourages good morals'. This view is supported by the inspection evidence and the opinions expressed in the staff questionnaires.
- While students' behaviour and attitudes to work are not outstanding, they have improved significantly. Lessons are seldom disrupted and most students work hard. This is because the academy has developed very effective approaches for identifying and responding to their emotional and social difficulties and these are applied consistently by all staff.
- In addition, an engagement team continuously monitors the students and 'nips problems in the bud' by identifying any who are troubled and providing them with immediate support.
- A very well-planned system of rewards and sanctions provides real incentives for pupils to stay focused on learning. The academy keeps clear records of students' achievements and problems, which are used effectively to plan guidance for them when it is needed.
- The number of temporary exclusions is low. If students are excluded they do not lose learning time because they are required to continue their lessons using the academy's excellent learning website. This is helped by the fact that the academy makes it possible for students to use a laptop or tablet computer at home.
- The school's work to keep students safe is outstanding. The engagement team continuously updates and reviews information about students' welfare and they take action immediately when a potential problem is detected. The team also has a very rigorous approach to ensuring that all adults in the academy are properly checked and receive safeguarding training.

- Students say they feel safe from bullying. This is supported by the academy's very thorough records of serious incidents. In discussion, students demonstrated their rejection of racist and homophobic abuse and of bullying using mobile phones or social media. They know how to stay safe when using the internet.

### **The leadership and management are outstanding**

- The Principal and headteacher form a very effective senior leadership partnership. Together they provide a combination of high-quality care and education which helps students to achieve much in a short time
  - The policy of appointing staff with expertise in creative industries, and developing their teaching skills, provides a curriculum which inspires students to re-engage in learning.
  - The headteacher provides an exceptionally strong programme of teacher training. It combines regular training events with excellent guidance to each individual following observation of their lessons. Many teachers told the inspector how much they benefited from this approach.
  - The academy works effectively with a teaching school alliance to help staff gain a broader view of effective education and this helps them achieve their teaching qualification. At the same time, the academy helps teachers from other schools to improve their skills in managing disaffected students and in using a school website to help students learn more effectively.
  - The academy's curriculum is very effective in motivating students to learn, in promoting their personal and social development and in giving them essential literacy and numeracy skills. Academy leaders recognise, however, that the limited range of courses restricts students' opportunity to gain the important qualification of five or more GCSEs graded A\* to C. They are now beginning to look for partnerships with other schools to remedy this.
  - Academy leaders adopt a rigorous approach to self-evaluation which gives them an accurate view of strengths and priorities for improvement. Every aspect of self-evaluation is focused on finding out how students' outcomes can be improved and there is no delay in taking effective action where necessary.
  - The engagement team contributes significantly to an excellent partnership with parents and carers and builds their trust in the academy. This enables them to provide frank information, often on a daily basis, about how well their children are making progress or what difficulties they are presenting. As a result, the majority of parents support the academy in trying to improve their children's behaviour and achievement.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The governing body systematically evaluates all aspects of provision by the extent to which it improves the behaviour, achievement and, therefore, employability of the students. Governors are helped in this by a well-organised website which gives them full access to the academy's self-evaluation and all the evidence supporting it. They use this information effectively in their monthly meetings to challenge academy leaders about any weaknesses or to support them in improving staffing and resources where necessary. Governors, therefore, make a significant contribution to raising students' achievement.
  - The governing body ensures that performance management is used effectively to reward teaching or leadership that strongly improves students' outcomes and to tackle any under-performance.

## 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>	138264
<b>Local authority</b>	Nottingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	424931

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy free school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	33
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Aftab Hussain
<b>Principal</b>	Chris Manze
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	0115 822 1834
<b>Fax number</b>	0115 822 1834
<b>Email address</b>	admin@stonesoupacademy.org.uk

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