

Continu Plus Academy

Finepoint, Kidderminster, DY11 7FB

Inspection dates 29–30 April 2015

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | This inspection: | Good 2 |
| Leadership and management | Good | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | Good | 2 |
| Achievement of pupils | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher, governors and academy leaders have established a strong and cohesive academy community in which students, staff and parents strive to meet the shared vision and learn together.
- Governors are skilled in supporting the academy in meeting its aims. They provide effective challenge and support in equal measure.
- The staff are very supportive of the academy leaders and work together to develop and improve the academy.
- Teaching is good because of the good relationships the teachers have with students.
- Teachers plan lessons which interest students and help them to make good progress.
- The curriculum is well matched to students' needs and aspirations, particularly in the range of vocational courses offered by alternative providers.
- Students are well-prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. In 2014, all Year 11 students leaving the academy moved on to a college course, an apprenticeship or into work.
- Students' progress in English and mathematics improves significantly when they join the academy. Disadvantaged students are catching up well with their peers.
- Students' behaviour in and around the academy is good. There is a strong community spirit. Students get on well with each other and with staff.
- Students are positive about the academy and say they feel safe as a result of the care and support they receive from staff.
- Leaders provide support and training for staff which enables them to improve their teaching and management of students' needs. This contributes successfully to making this an improving academy.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students do not have enough opportunities to use and improve their reading skills other than in English.
- Teachers do not consistently give clear feedback or guidance that will help students improve their work. They do not always check that students act upon the advice they are given through marking.
- Teachers do not consistently plan work that matches students' needs, particularly in mathematics.
- Some students' attendance is too low, meaning they miss too many lessons.
- Leaders do not make enough use of their evaluation of the academy's performance to identify key priorities for academy improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) visited 16 lessons. Some of these observations were carried out with academy leaders. The work in students’ books was evaluated. Shorter visits were made to other lessons and to activities including registration time, assemblies and intervention work.
- Two visits were made to alternative provision.
- HMI spoke to students, governors, members of the Trust Board, academy leaders and staff.
- HMI observed students’ behaviour around the academy and at alternative providers including at the breakfast club, at breaks and lunchtime and as they left the academy premises at the end of the day as well as in lessons.
- There were too few responses to the Ofsted on-line questionnaire, Parent View, to be considered. However, HMI considered the academy’s own records of contact with parents.
- HMI analysed the 11 returns from the staff questionnaire.
- HMI scrutinised a range of documents including the academy’s self-evaluation and development plans, information about students’ progress and attendance, policies and procedures and the safeguarding checks made on staff.
- Students’ attendance during this inspection was affected by an outbreak of an infectious illness. HMI scrutinised samples of work across a range of subjects for those students who were absent during the inspection.

Inspection team

Peter Humphries, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Chris Chapman

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Continu Plus Academy (CPA) opened as a Free School for Alternative Provision in September 2013. The academy moved into its current purpose-built premises in May 2014. CPA is part of the Continu Trust and works in partnership with seven secondary schools in the Wyre Forest and Hagley area, Kidderminster College, Universities of Birmingham and Wolverhampton, Barnardo's and Worcestershire County Council.
- CPA provides for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students who have been, or are at risk of being, permanently excluded from mainstream schools. Students in Key Stage 3 spend an average of six weeks at the academy before returning to their mainstream school. Students in Key Stage 4 remain at the academy and do not return to their mainstream school.
- The academy provides a breakfast club for students.
- Students are taught in mixed-ability classes. The number of students in each class is limited to eight.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for the pupil premium (government funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority) is well above average. The majority of students are dual registered and part of the pupil premium grant funding remains with the mainstream school.
- All students are disabled or have special educational needs and generally have a background of social, emotional and mental health difficulties. A small number of students have an Education Health Care Plan.
- A small number of students are looked after by the local authority.
- Students are predominantly from a White British background. None have English as a second language. The academy normally has more boys than girls.
- CPA uses a range of alternative providers for the vast majority of the 51 Key Stage 4 students, mainly for vocational courses. These include Groverspiece farm animal care, Crowsmill construction skills, Country Treks Equestrian Centre, Step-Out survival skills, Watts Klever Kloggs hair and beauty studies, Archway arts and design and Abberley Care Farm.
- The academy has not received any Year 7 catch-up funding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching from good to outstanding by ensuring teachers consistently:
 - provide high quality marking that enables students to improve their work and that students have time to act upon the feedback they receive
 - develop students' literacy skills in subjects other than English and provide increased opportunities for students to read widely and often across all subjects and at times other than in lessons
 - match work to students' needs, particularly in mathematics, by providing increased opportunities for students to solve problems and apply their mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - all actions that are being taken to improve the academy's work are thoroughly evaluated to assess their impact and the evaluation is used to identify key priorities and to plan the next steps
 - evaluation and subsequent intervention and action are more efficiently carried out by centrally collating the information about students' social and academic progress.
- Increase the attendance rate of students so that a greater number have an attendance in line with or above the national average.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, academy leaders and governors have established a culture where, no matter the difficulty, students, staff and parents believe that together they 'will work it out'. As a result, the quality of teaching, students' achievement and behaviour and the academy's work to keep students safe are good.
- The whole academy community shares the leadership's commitment and drive for further improvement and to ensure students have the best opportunities to experience success where previously they encountered failure.
- Teachers continually strive to improve their teaching. Each adult is highly trained in managing challenging behaviour. As a result there are few disruptions to learning. Leaders set challenging social and academic targets for the progress of students in their classes. Teaching standards, including those at alternative provision, are rigorously checked. Bespoke training and support is provided for all staff.
- Leaders have effectively tackled staff underperformance. This has resulted in teachers either improving their skills or leaving the academy if they fail to meet the required standard. Issues in the quality of mathematics teaching and the subsequent impact on students' progress in this subject have been tackled. As a result, students' progress in mathematics is now accelerating.
- Leaders rigorously monitor students' behaviour, attendance and progress at alternative provision. As a result, in 2014 nearly all the students completed their alternative provision courses and achieved a level one or level two qualification. Those students for whom the course was deemed unsuitable followed additional courses at CPA, for example the Arts Award.
- The curriculum has a strong focus on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills and on closing the gaps caused by previous disruptions to learning. This core programme is supplemented by alternative provision courses, science, outdoor education, the Arts Award, design technology, music, personal development sessions and a daily enrichment programme. As a result, students' progress in developing their literacy, numeracy, social, emotional and physical skills is good.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted well. British values, including tolerance and respect, permeate the life of the academy and are also made explicit in the way students are expected to relate to others. Thoughtfully planned use of the pupil premium is increasing the progress of disadvantaged students.
- The academy prepares students well for their next steps in education, employment or training. This work is supplemented by regular visits from careers advisers and business mentors. As a result, all the Year 11 students leaving the academy in 2014 moved on to college courses, an apprenticeship or into work.
- The Continu Trust provides valuable support to the academy. Members of the Trust Board have an excellent range of knowledge and skills. This expertise is shared across all the member schools. This helps CPA to develop and refine their policies and practice. As a result, students' behaviour and achievement is good. However, leaders' evaluation of academy performance does not consistently contribute to the priorities for academy improvement.
- Leaders thoroughly monitor and record students' needs and social and academic progress. This generates a wealth of information. However, data is not centrally collated or consistently used to put in place rapid intervention.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding students and recruiting staff meet statutory requirements. Staff and governors receive frequent and appropriate safeguarding training. As a consequence, students say they feel safe at the academy and at alternative provision.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - CPA is diligently and effectively governed by the Continu Trust. A local governing body monitors the

work of the academy and reports to the Trust Board. Governors insist on the highest standards of teaching, students' achievement and on ensuring students are well prepared for the next steps in education, employment or training. As one governor stated, 'they deserve no less'.

- Governors have a thorough understanding of how much progress students make. They receive ample information from the academy on how well students learn and progress. However, this information is not always clearly presented. Governors report clear improvement in the quality of teaching and students' achievement, particularly in mathematics since the academy opened in September 2013. HMI agree with this judgement. Governors are willing to take difficult decisions so that the academy provides the best for the students.
- Governors have a good understanding of how the academy rewards good teaching and tackles any underperformance. Governors visit the academy regularly to monitor the work of staff and students. Governors are skilled in supporting the academy in meeting its aims. For example, the governor supporting the headteacher and academy leaders is the headteacher of a local 'outstanding' school.
- Governors ensure that all safeguarding requirements and policies are in place. As a result, academy staff work effectively to ensure students are safe and know how to stay safe.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Staff are highly skilled in managing challenging behaviour and in ensuring students make the most of their time in the academy. As a result, the number of incidents of low-level disruption is declining and the occasional poor behaviour does not impact negatively on the learning of others. Students who spoke to HMI said that the academy is typically calm.
- The work in students' books demonstrates their positive attitudes to learning. Work is well presented, neat and accurate. Work is almost always completed. Students take pride in their work. The overwhelming majority of students' books are free from graffiti.
- The vast majority of students who spoke to HMI said that they enjoy coming to the academy and that their behaviour, attendance, progress and future prospects have significantly improved since joining CPA. They are proud of their academy. As a result, the academy buildings and facilities are treated with respect by all students. After break and lunchtime, there is little or no litter. The students' toilets are clean, hygienic and free from graffiti. Students' behaviour at alternative provision is equally good.
- Permanent exclusion is rare but appropriately used when necessary. Temporary exclusions have been reduced. Students are effectively 'reintegrated' into the academy following a temporary exclusion. Parents are involved in this process. As a result, the incidents of repeat offending are low.
- Improving attendance has been a challenge but one the academy has not avoided. As a result, students' attendance has rapidly improved since the academy opened. However, it remains below the average of mainstream schools and a small minority of students are persistently absent (missing more than 15% of lessons).

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The academy works with a host of organisations and agencies, including the police, to provide information, support and guidance on issues such as drug abuse, racism, gang and domestic violence and the risks of radicalisation by extremist groups. As a result, students say they feel safe. Staff are very vigilant and they quickly spot and respond to concerns.
- Procedures for safeguarding are robust, including checks on academy staff and governors. Leaders ensure that the academy is a safe place. The academy ensures students are safe and behave well when taught off-site.
- Students have a good understanding of different types of bullying and report that staff deal quickly and effectively with incidents when they happen. The number of bullying incidents has declined since the academy opened.

- Students can explain how the academy has helped them to understand how to keep safe in different situations and how to avoid the temptations to behave in an unlawful or anti-social manner. For example, they have a good awareness of how to stay safe on the internet and to recognise the signs of potential grooming.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers provide a range of activities that stimulate students' interest and engage them in their learning, many of whom previously disliked school. The positive relationships among students and between students and teachers enable students to feel confident to take risks and to make mistakes. The vast majority of students told HMI that they are now more resilient and willing to persevere in order to complete their work.
- The progress of students is accurately assessed through regular testing and checking of students' work. This information is carefully recorded and used to identify students who may be falling behind. Focused teaching or additional adult support is then provided to help these students to catch up. Leaders share this information with parents every six weeks. Teachers' assessments have been verified by external education consultants and agencies.
- Almost all lessons are well planned to cater for the diverse range of needs and abilities, including the most able, disabled students and those who have special educational needs. However, sometimes the tasks for students in mathematics are not matched to their needs.
- The previous weak teaching in mathematics has been tackled and the teaching of this subject is now good. As a result, students are now making faster progress. However, students do not have sufficient opportunities to solve problems and apply their mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding.
- The vast majority of teachers effectively question students to check their understanding and to intervene in order to correct students' mistakes or misconceptions.
- Teachers mark students' work frequently and usually provide students with helpful comments. However, teachers do not consistently give students clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work, nor do they check that students have acted upon the advice they are given.
- Consistently good teaching in English and appropriate interventions ensure that all students make good progress in reading and writing. However, students do not have regular opportunities to read widely and often across all subjects or when not in lessons. In addition, teachers of subjects other than English do not consistently help students' improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The vast majority of students join the academy with knowledge, skills and understanding that are below that for their age group in mainstream schools. This is due to their achievement being adversely affected by poor attendance and disruptions to their learning.
- Students in Key Stage 3 make good progress in reading, comprehension, writing, spelling, punctuation, grammar and mathematics. In addition, students' attitudes to learning improve as the result of carefully structured support to develop students' social and emotional skills. As a result, a large majority of Key Stage 3 students return successfully to mainstream schools.
- Students in Key Stage 4 stay at the academy throughout their studies. In 2014, the majority of students gained A* to G GCSE grades or equivalent in English, mathematics and science. Almost all of the students completed their alternative provision courses and achieved a level 1 or level 2 qualification in their chosen courses, such as motor vehicle maintenance, construction, hair and beauty and farm studies.
- Students who do not complete their alternative provision course complete qualifications at the academy,

for example the Arts Award. All students achieved a GCSE grade or equivalent in these qualifications. The academy does not enter students early for GCSE.

- The centre carefully monitors the progress of all students. Information provided by the academy shows that all groups of students achieve equally well.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well because staff plan tasks that meet their needs and enable them to make good progress.
- The academy uses the pupil premium funding to provide effective teaching support and resources for disadvantaged students. The progress made by these students over the past two years has been equal to or better than that of other students, and the amount of progress made over a year increased in 2014 from the levels in 2013. The gap between disadvantaged students at the end of Year 11 and their peers has closed significantly from a grade in English and mathematics to a quarter of a grade in both subjects.
- Students' previous low attainment in mathematics has been tackled and resolved. Students are now making faster progress in this subject due to the better teaching they receive.
- There are very few most-able students at the academy. However, challenging targets are set for these students and their progress carefully monitored. As a result, the most-able students achieve qualifications that enable them to continue higher-level qualifications when they leave the academy.
- Students are well-prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. In 2014, all Year 11 students leaving the academy moved on to a college course, an apprenticeship or into work. A large majority of current Year 11 students have already secured a college place, an apprenticeship or work.

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 | 139648 |
| Local authority | Worcestershire |
| Inspection number | 450220 |

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

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|--|--------------------------|
| Type of school | Pupil referral unit |
| School category | Academy free school |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 65 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Robert Chadwick |
| Headteacher | Sara Devo |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Telephone number | 01562 822463 |
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