

Isca Academy

Earl Richards Road South, Exeter, Devon EX2 6AP

Inspection dates

18–19 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders, in particular the headteacher, have changed the culture of the school. They have raised the aspirations of pupils and staff while promoting tolerance and respect.
- The executive headteacher and the headteacher are clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Improvements are effective and made rapidly.
- The multi-academy trustees have supported the school governors effectively throughout a period of change in leadership. A calm, purposeful and orderly environment exists.
- The standards in the school have improved over time. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.
- Leaders have focused on improving the attendance of pupils. This has been successful. The most vulnerable pupils are coming to school regularly.
- The new deputy headteacher is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. He provides tailored support for all teachers to improve their practice. However, middle leaders in the school are not consistently challenging staff where teachers' expectations are set too low.
- The performance of teachers is managed more efficiently. This is improving pupils' learning, experiences and progress. However, some staff are not consistent in their application of the school's marking policy to fully extend pupils' knowledge and skills.
- The teaching of English has improved considerably. Pupils are making progress that is better than the national average in this subject. As a result, literacy across the school is improving.
- The established leader of mathematics has maintained the high standards in pupils' outcomes.
- Pupils are well behaved and arrive at school ready to learn.
- Pupils are confident and willing to share their opinions. This is a useful trait that deepens their learning now and is essential for their future life.
- The funding for disadvantaged pupils is used expertly. As a result, these pupils are making good progress in school and in comparison with other pupils nationally.
- The school promotes valuable spiritual, moral, social and cultural activities.
- The choice of extra-curricular activities is impressive. Pupils and parents are very appreciative of the skills and confidence gained from pupils participating in these.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders monitor their departments rigorously to bring about more improvements in the quality of teaching and standards of achievement
- the school's marking policy is applied consistently and in a way that extends pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills further.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the headteacher's appointment in January 2016, the school has gone from strength to strength. She has gained the full support of the staff, pupils and parents. As a result, the school's ethos is one of high expectations and positive relationships. One parent commented, 'Isca has a very passionate head who strongly promotes attainment and progress for all children, whatever their individual starting points.'
- Leaders are determined to enable every pupil to make rapid progress and achieve successfully. They hold these ambitions for all pupils, regardless of their ability, circumstance or need.
- The Ted Wragg Multi-Academy Trust appointed an executive headteacher in September 2015. She is highly skilled and works closely with the school. This ensures strategic plans for the school are embedded fully. She provides 'an extra pair of hands and eyes' to monitor the school's work robustly.
- Leaders are accurate in their evaluation of the school's performance and this enables them to secure immediate improvement in identified areas. Systems for monitoring the progress of pupils, and their personal welfare and development, are comprehensive. Pupils who require extra support are identified early and speedy action is taken to enable them to catch up
- The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is good. The deputy headteacher understands that supporting the performance of teachers is the key to securing improvements.
- Middle leaders are held firmly to account for the standards achieved in their curriculum areas. Their ability to challenge staff, when expectations of pupils' progress are not high enough, is variable. However, middle leaders are keen to develop these important leadership skills and this training is provided by the trust.
- Changes are taking place for managing the performance of staff. The new system is more effective because it is better aligned to the individual development needs of staff as well as to pay awards.
- Those new to teaching feel well supported. They value the development opportunities provided by the multi-academy trust. Teachers meet colleagues from two other schools, including those in primary education. This broadens their understanding of the skills and knowledge of pupils when they first enter secondary education.
- Leaders and governors monitor the use of pupil premium funding efficiently and evaluate the impact of actions. As a result, barriers to involvement in extra-curricular activities have been removed. Disadvantaged pupils spoke openly about their appreciation of the funding which has allowed them to participate. These activities provide pupils with confidence in their abilities which has a direct impact on their progress in school.
- Pupils eligible for Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding are making good progress. The use of reading programmes has had a significant impact on the progress of pupils' accuracy and comprehension when reading. Their level of reading, currently,

matches pupils of similar ability.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. Funding has been used to train teaching assistants and they provide effective support, meeting key areas of need.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. The previous curriculum lacked appropriate breadth and balance. Some subjects in key stage 3 had too little time allocated. This meant that pupils were ill prepared for a full range of option choices at key stage 4. Consequently, the school's results were poorer in areas such as languages and humanities. Leaders have put appropriate additional support in place to plug the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding in these subjects.
- The extra-curricular activities available to pupils allow them to extend their knowledge and understanding, especially outdoor activities and cultural ventures. Parents commented on this aspect in the online survey, Parent View, with one parent saying, 'Isca Academy is genuinely life enriching beyond the academic.'
- Pupils are prepared positively for life in modern Britain through their personal, social, health and economic education programme and the provision for religious education. Pupils talk of how they are helped to understand the fundamental British values of democracy and equality. In particular, they enjoy debating on topical issues.
- All parents who responded to the Parent View survey would recommend the school to other parents.

Governance of the school

- Governance is strong.
- A recent review of the skills of governors helped in the restructure of the governing body which is smaller and more streamlined now. Each representative has a role closely matched to their expertise. Consequently, oversight of the school is more incisive.
- Governors say they have learned from past experiences. This has enabled them to understand more fully their responsibilities.
- The multi-academy trust oversees the local governing body effectively and provides good training and support. Governors appreciate being part of a larger, strategic group. They gain from sharing practice with colleagues from other trust schools.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders have moved beyond compliance by engineering a culture that advocates personal safety and well-being for all pupils and staff. Secure processes are in place for monitoring and recording any safeguarding concerns. The school works well with the local authority and communicates quickly when concerns are raised. Staff are trained on how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism. Staff work sensitively with parents and external agencies to monitor and support the more vulnerable pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge that enables them to plan learning competently, especially in languages, history and religious education.
- Assessment is planned carefully. Teachers use this effectively to identify and support any pupil whose learning is falling behind.
- Teachers' compliance with the school's policy on marking and feedback is variable. The best practice in applying the school's policy inspires pupils to reassess their work and enables them to make rapid improvement when studying.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by teaching assistants. Teachers are aware of the particular learning needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and most plan effective tasks accordingly. There are a few teachers who are receiving additional training to meet the needs of this group of pupils better.
- The most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils are challenged well in the key subjects of English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and languages. The most able pupils in Year 9 spoke eloquently of the more demanding tasks that are part of their GCSE studies.
- The best examples of skilful questioning occur in humanities where it deepens pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Homework is set regularly but is of variable quality. Good examples that embed and extend pupils' understanding are found in English, drama and textiles. The activities in English and textiles challenge pupils in the required research techniques. Homework activities in key stage 4 drama demand reflection on the progress of the course. This provides pupils and the teacher with crucial information on which to secure more rapid progress.
- A significant majority of parents felt their children were well taught and this is evidenced by the improved results in key stages 3 and 4.
- Reports to parents are clear and contain accurate information on how pupils can improve. This applies to curriculum subjects as well as behaviour and attendance, when necessary. By engaging parents in the progress of their children, the school's standards have improved more quickly, especially for those pupils who were less self-motivated.
- Pupils taught in the alternative provision of Exeter College and Bicton College are successful in their courses of engineering, motor vehicle maintenance and other subjects. Pupils have moved from this alternative provision to further education or apprenticeships in the recent past.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The pupils are confident and able to articulate their opinions. Furthermore, they are encouraged to do so. Leaders value pupils' views. An example of this was when pupils were asked to identify any areas where they felt uncomfortable. Following careful analysis of pupils' responses, leaders have ensured that these areas are monitored more closely and are no longer a problem for pupils.
- Pupils are eager to learn. They are punctual to school and lessons. They respond willingly to teachers' questioning in class or questions written in their books as feedback to their work.
- Pupils value the opportunities provided for them, both in school and in the extra-curricular pursuits.
- The school employs counsellors to support the mental health issues of pupils. Despite this, some pupils would welcome more help and advice on how to improve their emotional well-being.
- The majority of pupils feel safe at school. They understand how to protect themselves from risk, including online and from radicalisation and extremism. Ninety-eight per cent of parents who responded to Parent View said that their child feels safe at school.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying. Pupils confirm that bullying is not tolerated, but that tolerance of others is essential. On the few occasions that bullying occurs, it is dealt with promptly and productively.
- Healthy attitudes are encouraged through sports and other activities. Older pupils participate in the Ten Tors competition, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Exmoor challenge. Younger pupils in Year 7 participate in the Exe Valley challenge with primary pupils from within the trust and local primary schools. There is a range of sporting activities from horse riding, martial arts and Pilates to the more traditional basketball, football and athletics. Some of these are offered in the curriculum and others are offered at lunchtimes and after school with good take-up. The promotion of an acknowledgement of diversity is nurtured through the personal, social, health and economic education programme. As a parent of a Year 7 pupil commented, 'The range of extra-curricular activities offered has been very impressive, especially the outdoor education and arts events. Our daughter loves going to school in the morning and we feel that the teachers have struck the right balance of care and academic stretch to mean that she is a confident, happy and stimulated pupil.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Behaviour is, typically, considerate and polite. It reflects the care given by staff to pupils. Good relationships exist between staff and pupils.

- Leaders are proactive in checking behaviour logs. When a problem occurs with groups of pupils, action is taken which reduces repeat offences. In this way, high expectations of behaviour are established.
- The site is respected and there is no evidence of litter.
- Pupils wear their uniform with pride.
- Attendance and persistent absence overall have been better than the national average for many years. Previously, the attendance and persistent absence of the most vulnerable pupils were a cause for concern. Leaders have made a successful effort to improve this.
- Attendance at the alternative providers Exeter College and Bicton College is good and this is reflected in pupils' results at GCSE and BTEC National Diploma level 1 and 2.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' progress in mathematics has been consistently strong. The current progress in English is much improved and pupils are doing better than others nationally.
- Subjects that have been weak in the past, such as languages, humanities and science, are showing considerable improvement. This is true for French and geography, in particular. New leadership of history has had a strong impact on raising pupils' outcomes. Progress in core and additional science is improving steadily. Pupils who take the triple sciences achieve in line with the national average or better, each year.
- Pupils in key stage 3 are making good progress across the broad and more balanced curriculum. Teachers are secure in their assessment of knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils are being prepared carefully for their studies at key stage 4.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress in comparison with other pupils nationally. There remains a difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school but this is diminishing. Disadvantaged pupils seen and spoken with during the inspection are working as well as their peers.
- Leaders are aware that the number of most-able pupils is increasing over time and are adjusting expectations accordingly. Teachers are now providing more challenging activities that stretch and deepen thinking.
- The most able pupils in key stage 3 are on track to exceed the expected rates of progress. Year 9 pupils, who have just started key stage 4, are thriving on the additional challenge within their subjects.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Teaching assistants advance pupils' learning by becoming expert in a range of specialisms such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and autistic spectrum disorder. Hence, they can provide tailored support for individual pupils, leading to more rapid progress.
- Pupils read widely and teachers listen to them read aloud. The library is an excellent resource and is used by tutors and for teaching whole-class English lessons. However, pupils are not guided always to read books that are at an age-appropriate level or interest.
- Impartial careers guidance is appreciated by the pupils. They make sensible subject

choices for their future careers. As a result, pupils go on to other destinations successfully. A high proportion continue with their studies at university.

- The percentage of pupils who have not moved on to education, training or employment has reduced from 13% to 1%.

School details

Unique reference number	139682
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10019930

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	658
Appropriate authority	The academy trust
Chair	Gina Woodcraft
Headteacher	Aimee Mitchell
Telephone number	01392 204082
Website	www.iscaexeter.co.uk
Email address	adminoffice@iscaexeter.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Isca converted to an academy on October 1 2013. It is sponsored by the Ted Wragg Multi-Academy Trust. It operates with three schools: Isca Academy, Cranbrook Education Campus and St James School.
- When the predecessor school of the same name was last inspected in 2013, it was judged to require improvement.
- The school is a smaller than the average secondary school. It has a higher proportion of girls, more pupils eligible for pupil premium and more pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan than the national average.

- Approximately 30 pupils go to Exeter College to study GCSEs not available in school and engineering, construction and motor vehicle level 2 BTEC National Diploma, and level 1 BTEC National Diploma in hair and beauty. Sixteen pupils attend Bicton College to study land-based qualifications.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 33 lessons, of which 18 were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- A wide sample of pupils' work, from all year groups and a range of subjects, was scrutinised.
- Inspectors talked with pupils from Years 7, 8, 10 and 11; most-able and most-able disadvantaged pupils in Year 9; and a group of disadvantaged pupils from all years in formal meetings, as well as with pupils informally across the site.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, a number of senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body.
- Information and other documentary evidence were evaluated including that relating to safeguarding, assessment, school evaluation and external reviews.
- Inspectors took account of the 70 responses to the online Parent View survey and the parental survey undertaken by the academy, the 29 responses to the staff online survey and the six pupil responses to the online survey. The number of pupil responses was affected by a technical issue on Ofsted's IT system.

Inspection team

Kathy Maddocks, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Colin Logan	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Williams	Her Majesty's Inspector

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