

Astley Community High School

Elsdon Avenue, Seaton Delaval, Whitley Bay, Northumberland, NE25 0BP

Inspection dates 23–24 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although achievement in general improved well following the last inspection, the gap between the achievement of students attracting pupil premium funding and others remains wide. There is evidence that the gap is beginning to close but not quickly enough.
- Serious mistakes were made in the English department that led to a very substantial decline in GCSE English results in 2013.
- Effective systems were not in place to alert senior leaders to the serious problems in English quickly enough for them to rescue the situation. Once the headteacher and governors were notified, they acted swiftly and decisively to make sure that a similar mistake cannot happen again. However, it was too late to prevent students getting lower grades than expected in 2013.

The school has the following strengths

- Teaching is good. Work is pitched at the right level in the vast majority of lessons, enabling students of all abilities to make good progress. Students enjoy discussing ideas and are increasingly confident learning by themselves.
- Students behave very well and show positive attitudes to their learning. They treat each other with respect and there is very little bullying. Students feel very safe and are looked after well.
- The sixth form is good. Teaching is of a very high standard and achievement is good and improving. The curriculum is planned well to meet the needs of students and both academic and pastoral support is good.
- Governance is good. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well. They are prepared to take difficult decisions to address underperformance and they offer good levels of support and challenge to senior leaders.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors observed 29 lessons, of which one was observed jointly with a senior leader. In addition, the inspection team made a number of short visits to lessons to look at the quality of marking and visited a range of enrichment sessions.

Meetings were held with three groups of students, governors, representatives of the local authority and school staff, including senior and middle leaders.

Inspectors took account of the 10 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), questionnaires returned by staff and the summary of responses to a questionnaire issued recently to parents by the school.

Inspectors analysed examination results and scrutinised a range of other evidence, including the self-evaluation report, work in students' books, minutes of governors' meetings, records relating to behaviour and attendance and safeguarding documentation.

Inspection team

Jan Bennett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector

Barbara Waugh

Additional Inspector

Anne Smedley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, largely those known to be eligible for free school meals, is slightly below average but increasing.
- The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is around average but the proportion of students supported through school action is well below average.
- Two students are currently being taught off site.
- The school meets the current government floor standards that set minimum expectations for attainment and progress at the end of Key Stage 4.
- The school is in a hard federation with Seaton Sluice and Whytrig middle schools. The three schools share one governing body and Astley and Whytrig share the same executive headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that weaknesses in leadership and assessment practice that led to the poor English GCSE results in 2013 are remedied by making sure that the strategies and systems, introduced to ensure that a similar situation does not happen again, are fully embedded and effective.
- Raise the achievement of particular groups of students, especially those attracting pupil premium funding, by:
 - using existing data to provide summary reports in a simple and consistent format so that any issues can be identified easily
 - ensuring that middle leaders and teachers monitor gaps in performance between different groups of students carefully and on a more regular basis so that they can intervene quickly if necessary
 - evaluating the impact of the array of initiatives paid for by pupil premium funding in order to target support where it is most effective
 - ensuring that all teaching is good or better and every teacher plans lessons that meet the needs of everyone in the class.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students usually enter the school with prior attainment around average but Year 11 students sitting GCSE examinations in 2013 had prior attainment that was significantly lower than average.
- The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, increased to around the national average in 2011 with a further marked improvement in 2012 that lifted the proportion above average. In 2013, however, the percentage of students gaining a grade A* to C in GCSE English halved, dragging the proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, down to well below average.
- In 2011, not enough Year 11 students had made the expected progress in English and mathematics by the time they completed Key Stage 4. In 2012, however, more than average made the expected progress in both English and mathematics.
- Not all groups of students make good progress during their time in school. There is evidence to indicate that the gap in performance between students supported by pupil premium funding and others is narrowing but the gap remains too wide in the main school. Specific support for students attracting pupil premium funding is not yet targeted effectively enough.
- Students who have a statement of special educational needs make good progress because the school supports them well and monitors the impact of support closely. However, the progress of students supported at school action and school action plus requires improvement.
- The two students educated off site are on programmes tailored to their individual needs and they have the opportunity to gain English and mathematics qualifications. One student has already gained qualifications at level two. The students' progress and attendance are monitored carefully and are much improved.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and improving. A-level pass rates are good and a growing number of students are achieving high grades. Achievement on vocational courses is good. Sixth formers receive very effective initial advice and good support throughout their courses; consequently, very few students drop out.
- As a result of recent improvements in teaching, students are making good or better progress in a large majority of lessons but it will take time for this to be reflected in examination results.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is improving strongly. In four out of every five lessons observed during the inspection, teaching was good or better. None was inadequate. Teaching in the sixth form is of a very high standard and there is outstanding practice in mathematics, science, humanities and physical education.
- Teachers are adept at building on earlier learning and use a good mix of activities to engage and motivate. Questioning is used well to check on learning, to challenge and to unpick any misunderstandings.
- In the best lessons, teachers are very skilled at adapting tasks to match the differing abilities within the group enabling everyone to make good or better progress. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and they respond by working hard, helping each other and using initiative.
- In the few weaker lessons, either the pace of learning is too slow or the activities fail to meet everyone's needs resulting in some students wasting time.
- Teaching assistants give good support to students and teachers. They use questioning effectively, work well with the teachers and are quick to identify and help students who have lost concentration or having difficulty. Teaching assistants benefit from attending training sessions

for teachers and their own bespoke sessions.

- The quality of assessment and feedback is high and there are examples of excellent practice in mathematics, science and humanities. In these subjects, very detailed feedback is given and students use the advice to improve their work. In mathematics, for example, corrections are done and marked.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is very good in corridors, the dining hall and outside the school. Students are polite, show respect for each other and are courteous to adults and visitors. Throughout their two-day visit, inspectors heard no foul or abusive language anywhere in school. Low-level disruption in lessons has been virtually eradicated and students have a good attitude to learning. They arrive at lessons on time, they are well prepared and they settle quickly to learning. Students say that the new behaviour policy is well understood and is applied consistently.
- The school is a very harmonious community and students feel very safe. Records show that incidents of bullying are rare and students say that they are dealt with very quickly. Students are fully aware of the potential dangers posed by the misuse of the internet and know how to deal with this and other dangerous situations.
- Attendance is improving and is close to the national average. The number of persistent absentees is reducing following the appointment of a pastoral support worker, paid for with pupil premium funding. She works closely with the families of poor attenders and makes effective use of specialist support from external agencies where necessary.
- Data are used well to evaluate the progress being made in improving behaviour and attendance. Interventions, initiatives and support are evaluated carefully so that they can be refined and made more effective.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders have brought about considerable improvements in both teaching and behaviour since the last inspection. However, failures in leadership contributed to the significant deterioration in the 2013 GCSE English results. Systems should have been in place to identify problems earlier so that action could be taken. Nonetheless, once the headteacher was aware of the issues, he acted very quickly and took steps to make sure that the same situation does not arise again. English has a new leader, external consultants are supporting the department, assessment marks are externally moderated and senior leaders are monitoring the situation closely. Every effort has been made to ensure that affected students were able to start their post-16 courses and they are being prepared for resit GCSE English examinations in November.
- The headteacher communicates high expectations to staff and students. He is a strong leader, is highly visible around the school and very accessible. Senior leadership has been restructured and the new team is working well together to drive improvement. Senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school very well. The middle leadership team has been reduced giving more responsibility to fewer leaders. The new team is playing a leading role in improving teaching and is supported well by senior leaders. Strong and sustained improvements in teaching and behaviour demonstrate a strong capacity for improvement within the leadership team.
- Performance management is robust. Senior leaders check regularly on the quality of teaching and have an accurate view. A very comprehensive programme of professional development was introduced after the last inspection using the expertise of staff and drawing on best practice in the region. The programme, including generic training, attendance on external courses, bespoke support and subject-based development, is very effective.
- The progress of pupil premium students is monitored by leaders at all levels and a wide range of support strategies has been introduced. However, insufficient importance has been given to evaluating the impact of the many different initiatives in order to target resources more

effectively.

- The local authority provides useful reports on students' achievement and the headteacher gets very good advice and support from a Local Leader of Education (LLE), employed by the local authority. Governors use his reports to check their judgements are accurate. The headteacher works closely with other schools in Northumberland to utilise existing best practice in the region in order to compensate for the reduced capacity of the schools advisory service. He also buys in support from neighbouring local authority areas. Following the problem in English, support from the local authority has been good, and extra funding has been made available for external support and training. Governors say that the local authority gives good advice relating to finance and human resources, in particular, and they find the governor training very helpful.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and this is reflected in the warm, welcoming and calm environment. The enrichment programme is a strength and students are effective charity fund-raisers. Teachers, in a variety of subjects, take opportunities to raise ethical questions and encourage students to empathise with people in very different situations to their own.
- Safeguarding arrangements are fully in place and giving no cause for concern.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. The governing body knows the school very well and plays a very active part in bringing about improvement. Governors understand the issues around performance management well and give good support to the headteacher. They are not afraid to take tough action if needed. Governors take part in regular training, are up to date and seek advice where appropriate. They use their knowledge well to challenge senior leaders and they took swift action to tackle the problems in GCSE English. Governors are aware of the gaps in performance between different groups of students. They monitor closely the progress of pupil premium students and ask challenging questions about the effectiveness and impact of the support provided.

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	122374
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	428899

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	616
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	166
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Dungworth
Headteacher	John Barnes
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2012
Telephone number	0191 237 1505
Fax number	0191 237 6891
Email address	reception@astleyhigh.org

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