

North Durham Academy

High Street, Stanley, County Durham, DH9 0TW

Inspection dates 20–21 May 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Teaching is not consistently good across all subjects.
- Students do not reach national standards across the full range of GCSE subjects.
- Too few students have been making good progress during their time in the academy. This is particularly true for the most-able students and students of middle ability.
- Some teachers are not using information about what students can and cannot do to plan work that maximises the learning of all students. The work does not always challenge students sufficiently, especially the most-able students.
- The quality of marking is too variable in the way it helps students to improve their work. Some students do not consistently respond to the guidance they are given.
- Some students demonstrate poor attitudes to learning. A minority of students, particularly some of those in Years 7, 8 and 9, do not value the importance of learning sufficiently highly.
- Behaviour is not always managed effectively in lessons.
- Staffing is not yet stable. As a result, a significant minority of classes experience discontinuity and disruption to their learning.
- The effectiveness of the sixth form provision requires improvement. Standards are not yet at national levels and teaching and progress, as in Years 7 to 11, are not yet good.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal is moving the academy forward and the standards that students attain have been rising year on year. Good appointments in key subjects are helping to accelerate improvement.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is good. It is helping to improve teaching and raise achievement. Staff are very positive about the help they receive to improve their practice.
- Teaching in English, mathematics and science is increasingly effective. A particular strength is the impact of consistently good teaching in languages.
- Students say that they feel very safe and well looked after. Parents and staff agree strongly that students are kept safe.
- The academy is a calm and orderly environment. Students are very proud of the new building and appreciate the facilities and opportunities on offer.
- Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is helping to prepare students well for life in modern Britain.
- Governance is strong and, along with the academy's sponsors, holds the academy to account rigorously.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all year groups in a wide variety of subjects across the academy, but with a focus on areas that had been less strong in the past. Four lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors examined information from the academy about current students' progress. They also looked at work over the whole year, where possible, in students' books.
- Meetings were held with the Principal and other leaders, including some in charge of subjects.
- The lead inspector met the Chair of Governors who is also one of the academy's sponsors. The lead inspector also met a representative of the local authority, another of the academy's sponsors.
- Several meetings were held with students. In addition, inspectors took many opportunities to talk with students in classes and around the academy.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, the academy's and departmental development plans, and external views of the academy.
- The inspectors examined records of attendance and persistent absence. They also examined records of behaviour, including exclusion, as well as information about the quality of teaching and the performance of staff.
- The inspectors took into account the 65 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and also the academy's own surveys of parents' views. Inspectors also took account of the 105 responses from members of staff to their questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alison Thomson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Graeme Clarke	Additional Inspector
Anne Smedley	Additional Inspector
Paul Welford	Additional Inspector
Frank Cain	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- North Durham Academy is a larger-than-average secondary school. It opened in September 2011 and is sponsored by New College Durham and Durham County Council. The academy moved to its current site in September 2013. Sixth form provision started in September 2013.
- Almost all students are of White British Heritage. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the proportion whose first language is believed not to be English is much lower than average.
- The proportion of students who are disadvantaged, and therefore supported by the pupil premium, is much higher than the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is in line with the national average.
- The academy has a learning resource base for students with speech, language or communication difficulties. All of these students are fully integrated into the academy and supported alongside their peers.
- A small number of students are educated off site, either part time or full time at the YMCA in Consett, the Green School at Lanchester or at the Houghall Campus of East Durham College.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Since the previous inspection in June 2013, there have been considerable changes in staffing, including some at senior and middle leadership level.
- At the time of the inspection, nearly 20% of staff were not on permanent contracts.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and progress for all students, including those in the sixth form, by:
 - using information more effectively about what students can and cannot do when planning lessons
 - ensuring that students, particularly the most able, are challenged as much as possible
 - improving the quality of marking so that all students are clear about what they need to do to improve their work and making sure that students respond to this guidance
 - managing behaviour as effectively as possible so that the learning of all students, particularly those in Years 7, 8 and 9, is not disrupted in any lesson.
- Improve the attitudes to learning of a minority of students by:
 - raising the aspirations of some younger students who do not currently see learning and education as important
 - giving a higher profile to the importance of completing work and presenting it well
 - ensuring that attendance continues to rise so that it at least matches that found nationally.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The vision and determination of the academy's Principal, governors and sponsors ensure that improvements are occurring year on year. There have, for example, been improvements, increasingly more rapid, in a number of areas. GCSE results have improved, teaching has improved and behaviour, attendance and provision in the sixth form are improving. However, there are inconsistencies in each aspect that mean that they are not yet good .
- The leadership of teaching is good. There is an effective professional development programme. Teachers appreciate the help they receive through initiatives such as 'Teach Meet' where good practice is shared. Teachers' performance is managed competently, with robust challenge where needed, and there are comprehensive programmes of support for any underperformance. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved. There is, however, a legacy of poorer teaching which the academy has yet to overcome.
- The academy has recruited a significant number of new staff, including some new senior and middle leaders. Although many of the leaders are relatively new, many are already making a positive difference in their areas. Currently, there are a number of teachers who are not on permanent contracts and there is interruption and inconsistency in learning in some classes. This situation will change when permanent staff take up their appointments in September 2015.
- Middle leaders, including those in charge of subjects, have been involved in bringing about improvement, but their roles require further development, particularly in areas where performance is less effective. A small number of leaders have not been effective in checking on and improving the quality of teaching or behaviour in their areas. This has impacted adversely on efforts to improve students' learning and progress.
- The majority of staff are positive about all aspects of the academy, although a minority have reservations about areas such as students' behaviour and the way in which it is managed.
- The academy's systems for checking on how well students are achieving are very comprehensive and thorough. Any student who is in danger of underachieving is quickly identified and strategies, such as additional support, are put in place to address this. However, some teachers do not use this information well enough to match work closely to students' abilities and this slows progress.
- Safeguarding meets statutory requirements. The academy is effective in ensuring that all students are well cared for, particularly the most vulnerable. Child protection procedures and risk assessments for visits are thorough. As a result, students feel very safe.
- The academy is very inclusive and it works well to promote equality of opportunity, tackle discrimination and foster good relationships. Additional funding, including the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding, has been used successfully to boost students' performance. As a result, literacy and numeracy are improving and gaps in attainment between disadvantaged and other students are closing year on year.
- The academy constantly reviews the impact of the curriculum and adjusts it accordingly. For example, the more-able students in Year 10 now take separate sciences and English literature is an option. The curriculum is particularly well adapted for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. This has helped these students to make generally good progress. This is also true for students in the learning resource base.
- The academy liaises with alternative providers and monitors closely the achievement, behaviour, attendance and safety of the students who attend these provisions.
- Spiritual, moral, cultural and cultural provision is good and prepares students well for life in modern Britain. Students are taught of the dangers of radicalism and extremism. Sports and the arts are strong and students regularly take part in activities such as the recent 'Live' concert.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is very strong and there is no doubt that it has helped the academy to improve. Governors, some of whom are from sponsor institutions and trustees of the academy, have a very accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. They use their considerable expertise well to support and challenge the academy, for example when improvement was not occurring as fast as it should have been.
 - The governing body is proactive in managing the academy's budget, including funding for disadvantaged students, and its members are aware of the good impact that this is having. Governors are extremely knowledgeable in understanding data about students' performance. They are fully informed about the quality of teaching and the targets to raise performance.
 - Governors have ensured that weaknesses in teaching have not been rewarded; they have not been

afraid to make some difficult decisions about staffing and have helped to secure some very good recent appointments. They have ensured that the academy has addressed the areas for development identified by external advisers and the Department of Education's monitoring.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. This is because a small minority of students, mainly in Years 7, 8 and 9, choose not to behave well in some lessons. This disrupts not only their learning but also the learning of other students. This tends to happen when teaching is weak and where there is a lack of continuity in their learning.
- In discussion with inspectors, students identified two factors which prevent the academy from being better than it is. These are a lack of respect shown to some teachers and the low importance some students placed on education. This was evident in some students' books, where work was not finished and where students did not respond to advice on how to improve their work.
- The vast majority of students behave well and take a keen interest in their learning. This was illustrated well in a Year 11 science revision lesson where students were very focused on acting upon advice from their teacher.
- Students, staff and parents report that behaviour is improving and is considerably better than it was. The reward system is having a positive impact for the vast majority of students. Exclusions have reduced considerably from what they were two years ago. This has been helped by the academy's system of behaviour consequences.
- Conduct around the academy between lessons, at breaks and lunchtimes is good, even at the busiest of times. Students are very proud of their new surroundings, as evidenced by the lack of litter and graffiti.
- Attendance is improving year on year, but is not yet in line with national figures. Punctuality has improved and there are few instances of lateness.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff are clear about their role in keeping students safe. Leaders make sure that staff are regularly and suitably trained about safeguarding.
- Teachers place considerable importance on safety in lessons and inspectors observed students working safely in practical lessons.
- Students, including those who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, and those supported by the specialist provision on site, say that they feel safe and well cared for.
- Students are very knowledgeable about the different forms of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying. They are aware of issues around sexual exploitation and of cyber-bullying, and say that hardly any bullying occurs. They appreciate the academy's texting system for reporting any issues that do occur and say that these are dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Parents who responded to Parent View and the academy's own records of parental surveys show that parents strongly agree that the academy keeps their children safe. Virtually all of the large number of staff who returned the staff questionnaire agreed strongly that the academy keeps its students safe.
- The academy checks with off-site providers that safeguarding provision is effective and that the safety, attendance and behaviour of the small numbers of students who attend is good.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is not yet strong enough to overcome past underachievement. It does not challenge all students, especially the most able, to aim for the highest grades in all subjects.
- The quality of teaching varies across subjects and within departments. There are too many lessons where teachers' knowledge of what students already know or gaps in their knowledge are not used sufficiently well to move them on to the next level of learning quickly and successfully.
- Leaders have done much to develop and improve teachers' marking and the quality of feedback given to students is improving, both in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form. However, the quality of the advice given is variable and teachers are inconsistent in checking that students act on any advice given.
- A few teachers have difficulty in managing students' behaviour when they choose to be uncooperative. This was apparent in a few Years 7, 8 and 9 classes where teachers were not able to nip such behaviour

in the bud. This has a detrimental on the learning of the whole class.

- The academy's senior leaders have identified strengths in teaching. Inspectors saw lessons where teaching resulted in good and occasionally outstanding progress. Here, teachers had high expectations, matched work well to the differing needs of their students and encouraged students well to improve their learning.
- Teaching in some areas consistently results in good progress, for example in languages. Year 7 students have French pen pals, which is one way of learning about other cultures. Teaching in mathematics, an area of previous concern, is improving strongly and is resulting in students generally making better progress.
- Curriculum support workers are used effectively and work alongside teachers to help provide well-targeted support to disabled students and those who have special educational needs. As a result, these students make good progress because their specific needs are understood well and met. Students in the specialist on-site provision also progress well because of good teaching and support.
- Students have opportunities to practise their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other lessons. Students are encouraged to use subject-specific technology, for example, through stimulating displays in classes. The teaching of reading is good and literacy is given a high profile through initiatives such as 'Wow Word Wednesday' on electronic displays around the academy.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the academy in Year 7 with attainment that is well below national average. They leave at the end of Year 11 with standards that are still well below national averages. Therefore, achievement requires improvement.
- Due to improved teaching in English and mathematics, an increasing proportions of students are now making expected progress in English and mathematics from their different starting points. As yet, however, not enough students make good or better progress.
- The progress made by the most-able students is sometimes limited because the work they are given does not always stretch them sufficiently or make them think deeply enough. Consequently, they do not always have sufficient in-depth knowledge and understanding to allow them to attain the highest grades.
- Standards have been improving year on year and they are rising faster than the rise nationally. In 2014, published data show that 42% of students attained five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, building on the increase seen the previous year.
- Achievement is improving significantly. The academy's reliable and comprehensive tracking evidence, verified by external moderation, indicates that students' achievement in 2015 is likely to show considerable improvement on the 2014 results.
- Inspectors' scrutiny of current students' work across the academy shows that students are making rapid gains in different subjects. One of those subjects is mathematics, an area where improvement in the past had not been rapid enough. Other previously weaker subjects where improvements are to be found include science, history, and design and technology. Progress in languages is consistently good and in English it is rising rapidly, although it is not yet good over time.
- The progress of disadvantaged students is improving, although it is not yet good overall. Published data for 2014 show that in mathematics the progress of disadvantaged students in the academy was slower than that of other students in the academy and other students nationally. The data also show that in English, the progress of disadvantaged students in the academy was slower than that of other students nationally, but in line with other students in academy.
- Published data show that gaps in the standards attained between disadvantaged students and their peers have closed year on year. When compared to other students in the academy, disadvantaged students were about half a GCSE grade behind in English and nearly one grade behind in mathematics in 2014. Compared to other students nationally, disadvantaged students in the academy attained half a grade lower in English and one and a half grades lower in mathematics.
- The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is generally good. This includes students who are in the learning resource base. These students make good progress because of the specialist teaching they receive. Students benefit from the good work of the learning support workers who scaffold the work well for them when they are taught alongside their peers.
- The academy uses Year 7 catch-up money well to enhance the skills of students who need additional help with their literacy and numeracy. A bespoke curriculum and small-group support is having a good impact on their progress. Reading has a high priority and is promoted well through initiatives such as world book

day, when members of staff came dressed as different characters, such as Nanny McPhee and The Cat in the Hat. The inspectors confirmed students' enjoyment of reading by listening to students read and also by observing students reading in class.

- The academy checks carefully on the progress of the few students who attend the alternative provisions. These students generally make good progress as they are taught well and have courses that meet their needs well.
- No students are entered early for examinations.
- Students are being prepared increasingly well for the next stage in their education, training or employment. Literacy and communication technology are integrated into many lessons and numeracy increasingly so. For example, inspectors observed students making good progress in a motor vehicle studies lesson, where they successfully calculated gear ratios.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- This sixth form was only established in September 2013 and this is the first year of A-level study. The AS results in 2014 were low and students' progress was inadequate. However, attainment and progress have risen considerably this year. The academy's data and inspectors' scrutiny of work, together with progress seen in lessons, confirm this.
- The academy reacted promptly to last year's weak results and produced an effective action plan to bring about improvement. The involvement and advice of the academy's main sponsor, New College Durham, has aided improvement by sharing of best practice in teaching sixth form students. This is bringing dividends and the quality of teaching and learning has improved. However, teaching is not yet good because teachers do not always use progress information to match work well enough to students' abilities, particularly the most able. Nor do they always give students clear enough guidance on how to improve work or develop independent study skills.
- As the sixth form is a recent addition to the academy, it is not possible to say definitively that the sixth form met the 16 to 19 interim standards specified by the Department of Education in 2014. There is every indication, however, that these standards will be met this year.
- In 2014, the majority of students who entered the sixth form without grade C at GCSE in either English or mathematics improved their grade or gained an equivalent qualification. This is also likely to be true this year.
- Retention rates are good and attendance has improved to be above average.
- Students are positive about the advice and guidance they receive. Courses are increasingly well-matched to their needs and interests. There is a much wider range of courses on offer this year, including some vocational courses. Work experience and other opportunities prepare them well for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Last year a significant number of students went on to higher education and that number is set to rise this year.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good and students say they feel safe and well looked after. They are good role models for younger students, taking on a range of responsibilities and leadership roles as prefects and mentors for younger students.
- Leadership is good and has led to improvements over the last year in students' achievement and personal development.

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	136745
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	462277

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,138
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Rasmussen
Headteacher	David Thornton
Date of previous school inspection	26 June 2013
Telephone number	01207 292180
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	info@ndacademy.co.uk

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