

The Blyth Academy

Chase Farm Drive, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 4JP

Inspection dates 19–20 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
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. It is not good because

- Rates of students' progress and achievement are not consistently good enough. Too few students, including the most able and the disadvantaged, achieve well. This includes achievement in English and mathematics.
- Expectations of what individual students can achieve from their starting points are not high enough. This includes in the layout of their work.
- The quality of teaching is too variable in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- The level of challenge in students' learning is not always well enough tailored to individual abilities.
- Students' behaviour requires improvement. In a minority of lessons, low-level disruption interrupts learning.
- Opportunities are occasionally missed to report to parents and add to their confidence that the academy is improving.
- Reading, writing and communication skills are not taught well enough across all subjects to make certain that students are confident answering questions, reading fluently and accurately, and writing at length.
- In teachers' marking, the quality of written feedback varies too much. It does not always provide clear steps for improvement and demand corrections to eradicate misconceptions and build upon earlier learning.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students' achievement varies too much across different subjects.
- Recent changes to strengthen and sharpen leadership and management at all levels have not had time to make a full impact on students' learning. As a result, the academy has not shown that it can improve at a fast rate in all aspects of its work.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders, the academy Trust and governors are ambitious and have a firm focus on the academy's improvement priorities, in order to secure improvements at a faster pace. As a result, past underperformance and underachievement are being firmly tackled in the drive to provide a good education for all students.
- Ever more confident and skilled leadership in English and mathematics is playing a key role in raising students' achievement.
- The best learning engages and motivates students well. Students report that they feel safe and secure.
- Students' improved attendance and reducing exclusion rate show tangible improvements in students' behaviour and attitudes to work.
- An interesting curriculum offers a wide range of learning opportunities for students.
- Care, support and guidance for students in the sixth form are strengths.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons and five paired observations were carried out with senior leaders. Detailed work scrutiny was carried out with leaders and managers. In addition, the inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and undertook walks around the academy in order to check the quality of what is provided for students.
- The inspectors spoke with students and had discussions with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, staff, governors, parents, members of the Trust and the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors also examined a range of documents including those related to safeguarding, the academy's view of how well it is doing, the monitoring of staff performance, the academy's improvement plan and records relating to students' progress and behaviour.
- The inspectors took account of the 59 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of the 40 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector
Jim Hall	Additional Inspector
Peter Eves	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and caters for students aged from 11 to 18. The Blyth Academy converted to become an academy school on 1 October 2013. When its predecessor school, Blyth Community College, was last inspected by Ofsted in 2012, it was judged to be inadequate overall.
- Most students are of White British backgrounds, with a very few who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- Currently, an above average proportion of the students are disadvantaged and therefore eligible for support through pupil premium funding. This is funding the school receives for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Almost all of the students enrolled into the sixth form are recruited from Year 11, with very few from local schools.
- No students are entered early for GCSE examinations.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- A small minority of students from Years 10, 11, 12 and 13 attend vocational courses away from the academy site for some or all of the time. The courses are provided by: Northumberland College, Choysez, Get U Started and Skills 4U. A very few students currently attend the local authority pupil referral provision full time.
- Since converting to an academy, there have been significant changes in staffing at all levels, including a whole-academy restructuring to ensure financial viability and a reorganisation of senior leadership. A new substantive headteacher is due to take up post in September 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to ensure a consistent pattern of fast progress and high achievement, by:
 - raising the staff's expectations of what students of all abilities can achieve, including the most able and those in the sixth form
 - ensuring that all staff consistently apply the academy's routines to eliminate low-level disruption in lessons
 - using the available good-quality information on students' progress to shape and adapt tasks to match students' abilities closely
 - using questioning to challenge and engage students to extend their knowledge and deepen their understanding
 - marking students' work and adding to the challenge of learning by providing well-defined steps for improvement and demanding corrections be made
 - making certain that the layout of students' work in books is of the highest standard in all subjects.
- Sharpen up leadership and management further to accelerate the rate of academy improvement, by:
 - ensuring that the regular checks on the quality of teaching and students' performance are fully established, rigorous, consistently applied and use all available evidence in all subject areas
 - frequently checking the patterns of progress for all groups of students, including groups in the sixth form, to eliminate inconsistencies at a faster rate
 - continuing to give the highest priority to engaging parents in order to build upon their support and confidence in the academy's performance.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Senior leaders, including governors, are increasingly responsive to addressing weaknesses in the academy's performance and speeding up the pace of improvement. Nevertheless, recent changes have yet to be fully established so that they have a sustained impact on accelerating students' progress and raising achievement at a fast rate from the low points evident in the past.
- The strengthening of the leadership of teaching and learning is having a positive impact on tackling teaching which requires improvement. A firmer emphasis on eliminating the variations that exist in teaching is leading to improvements. Nevertheless, despite increased attention to checking the performance of staff to ensure there is no automatic pay progression, systems to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and scrutinise students' outcomes are not rigorous enough across the academy. Staff check students' performance when they are off-site effectively.
- The improving effectiveness of middle leadership is resulting in closer scrutiny of performance in different subjects. Middle leaders are increasingly confident and skilled in analysing performance and spotting inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in their subject areas. However, they miss opportunities to check rigorously the impact of their actions.
- The varied and interesting curriculum is well matched to the abilities and interests of students. A good range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural experiences help to prepare students well for life in the diverse society that is modern Britain. For example, the whole-academy Anti-Slavery week underpinned key British values of tolerance, respect and rule of law well.
- Students are provided with good-quality information, advice and guidance. Objective careers guidance makes certain that students are able to make confident and informed choices. Staff work hard to secure equality of opportunity, removing barriers to students' learning, narrowing gaps, improving attendance and reducing the once high levels of inappropriate behaviour. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated. They recognise, however, that more needs to be done to ensure students behave well and achieve as well as those in other schools nationally.
- The effectiveness of the use of the pupil premium funding is improving and enabling disadvantaged students to catch up. However, attainment gaps are not being closed consistently or fast enough in all subjects.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and day-to-day practice to protect students and keep them safe is effective. This includes the thorough checking of attendance and behaviour of students of all ages, including those educated off-site.
- In conversations, parents revealed ever-increasing confidence in the effectiveness of the academy's performance as their children's aspirations rise and their achievement improves. They particularly appreciate the support and guidance that families receive, such as when identifying any special educational needs their children may have. Nevertheless, responses to the online questionnaire show that there is more to do to gain the full confidence of parents in the academy's performance.
- The improvement partner and sponsor have an accurate view of the academy's performance. They have worked closely with the academy's leaders since it opened, providing robust challenge and effective support in equal measure for senior leaders and managers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The well-led governing body is totally committed to securing the academy's improvement at a much faster rate. This is apparent in what at times is an uncompromising level of challenge that they present to senior leaders when driving the academy forward. The extensive range of governors' expertise and experience, firmly underpinned by the sponsor's know-how, make certain they understand the data about the academy's performance and have an accurate view of the quality of teaching. They check performance management systems to ensure that pay progression is firmly linked to students' outcomes. Governors closely check the impact of the pupil premium funding and are well aware of the improvements needed in its effectiveness. Since the academy conversion, they have restructured the whole staff to ensure financial viability and sustainability and have strengthened senior leadership when required.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. In classrooms and in social areas, students' conduct is

largely good. Students are well aware of the boundaries that are set for their conduct. They are clear about the routines that are in place for their day-to-day management. Relationships with staff, who provide good role models, are normally relaxed and respectful. Through the good promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, students learn the importance of British values, such as tolerance, fair play and respect for difference.

- A majority of students are keen to learn and turn up on time, well prepared for their lessons. Their enjoyment of academy life is evident in their constantly improving attendance. Despite significant improvements since the academy opened, behaviour requires improvement, however, because low-level disruption interrupts the flow of learning in a small minority of lessons. At times, students do not persevere enough to achieve success and self-control.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students feel safe. They are provided with good support to make sure they learn how to recognise and manage danger and risk, such as when using new technology.
- Students are well informed about the different forms that bullying can take. They report that any inappropriate behaviour is resolved effectively and promptly by staff. In discussions, students displayed a good sense of fair play and a willingness to help others. During conversations, a group of parents expressed appreciation of the effective way the academy cares for their children.
- Attendance, which is currently broadly average, has improved steadily since the academy opened from previous low levels. This is the result of a determined whole-academy drive and robust systems for checking attendance, including for those students educated off-site. These improvements and the falling exclusion rate demonstrate students' increasingly positive attitudes to learning.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- In spite of measurable improvements in the quality of teaching, its impact over time remains too variable. Even with an emerging pattern of quicker progress in English and mathematics, the pace of improvement is not fast enough to eradicate attainment gaps and sustain at least good achievement.
- While there is good practice in teachers' planning, learning and assessment, not enough use is made of the good-quality information available about students' progress to shape and adapt activities to closely match students' varying abilities. As a result, students' interest is not always captured and held and their knowledge and understanding are not continuously built upon.
- When students' progress is variable and achievement requires improvement:
 - expectations of what each student is capable of achieving are not high enough
 - tasks are not well enough tailored to present the right level of challenge for individual students
 - questioning does not continuously probe students' thinking and understanding to eradicate misunderstandings and add to their knowledge
 - opportunities are missed during activities across subjects to practise students' speaking, reading and writing skills.
- When progress is quicker and exceeds expected rates:
 - staff have a detailed insight into what each student can do and use their good subject knowledge to deepen understanding
 - students' active participation in learning is fostered well and their interest held for long periods
 - questioning continuously stretches students' thinking and checks for misconceptions
 - marking is regularly helpful in directing students how to make further progress.
- When expectations and demands are thoughtfully matched to students' interests, teaching contains that essential trigger to enable students to achieve at least well. Activity plans are regularly modified and fine-tuned to take account of any gaps and misunderstanding in students' knowledge and understanding. Essential skills of speaking, reading and writing are practised frequently and extended.
- Despite improvements, marking is not consistently helpful in informing students how well they have done, what needs to be corrected and how they can improve. Students are not always challenged enough about the accuracy of the layout of their work. As a result, they do not get firmly into the habit of organising the layout of their work in ordered, accurate and refined ways.

The achievement of pupils**requires improvement**

- Senior leaders have maintained a firm focus upon improving the quality of teaching in order to address previous low levels of achievement and attainment. Consequently, there is a trend of improvement in most subjects, including English and mathematics. Nevertheless, although progress rates are rising and inconsistencies are being tackled, a pattern of at least good progress for all students has not been sustained.
- Students enter the academy with below average attainment. Their speech, language and mathematical skills are often weak. Students' aspirations and self-confidence are also often low. In 2014, the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, did not improve markedly on the very low attainment evident when the academy opened, even on best entry figures. The proportions of students achieving higher grades in English and mathematics were low.
- As a consequence of the decisive action taken to strengthen leadership and management at all levels and improve teaching, the proportion of students attaining five or more good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, looks set to reach the minimum standard required for secondary schools in 2015. However, despite improvements, progress rates in most subjects remain too variable.
- The most able students are responding positively to the academy's drive to foster more active participation in learning. Inspection evidence shows that the challenges and demands made of them are increasing and these are helping to boost their achievement. However, not enough activities encourage the most able students to think critically, make deductions, provide well-reasoned solutions, persevere and work things out for themselves.
- Students who are disabled, those who have special educational needs and the very few who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their classmates. Although current progress still varies and requires improvement, it is speeding up as interventions and support are increasingly focused upon students' precise individual needs.
- Attainment gaps in the performance of disadvantaged students are narrowing with others nationally and their classmates. In mathematics, gaps are narrowing relatively quickly. In 2014, wide gaps of close to two grades between disadvantaged students and others nationally were evident in both English and mathematics. Gaps in attainment with their classmates were over one grade. Current academy information, supported by inspection evidence, confirms that gaps in English and mathematics are narrowing both with their classmates and others. In mathematics, gaps in attainment are on course to be halved and reduced to one grade in mathematics when compared to non-disadvantaged students nationally and their classmates. In English gaps are likely to narrow by less than half a grade. The progress of disadvantaged students requires improvement when compared to non-disadvantaged students nationally.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is being used well to boost the development of essential literacy skills, particularly students' reading. This is because intervention and support programmes are increasingly better matched to individual abilities, helping students to build upon their skills progressively.
- Students who are educated off-site for part or all of their timetable complete their courses successfully. This helps to ensure that all students progress to education, training or employment at the end of Year 11.

The sixth form provision**requires improvement**

- Students join the sixth form with below average standards. Students' attainment at the end of Year 13 is below that found nationally, although it does vary year on year. Students make better progress in vocational subjects, including those undertaken off-site, but overall their progress and achievement are too variable.
- Good leadership and management of the sixth form ensure that staff work tirelessly to boost students' aspirations and self-confidence. The good levels of care and support that staff provide for students ensure that students feel safe and almost all are able to progress successfully to higher education, further education or employment, including apprenticeships. The resolute focus on improving the quality of teaching is paying dividends as increased proportions of students gain the grades required for a university place. However, inconsistencies remain in students' achievement, particularly in Year 12.
- Teaching, though sometimes good, requires improvement because at times it is insufficiently challenging and varies too much in quality across different courses.
- The behaviour of students in the sixth form is good. Students are helpful, polite and most are conscientious. They play a positive role in academy life, such as when mentoring younger students during reading sessions and running a cycle club. They benefit from a wide and varied enrichment programme

which places firm emphasis upon British values. This helps to prepare them well for life beyond the academy. Attendance and punctuality are good.

- The good quality of guidance, including that provided by careers specialists, helps students make balanced and informed choices. Parents are particularly appreciative of the help and support their families receive when their children are considering university applications. In many cases, it is the first time a family member has applied to a university to study for a degree. In conversations, students express appreciation of the high-quality relationships that they enjoy with staff and the effective help that they receive to identify and manage risk and danger.

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	140002
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	450111

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	828
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Hall
Principal	Alison Jobling
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01670 798100
Fax number	01670 359180
Email address	admin@theblythacademy.org

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