

North Durham Academy

High Street, Stanley, County Durham DH9 0TW

Inspection dates

3–4 October 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Despite eradicating previously identified inadequate teaching, leaders' efforts to improve the quality of teaching have not yet led to all groups of pupils achieving well over time.
- Current pupils do not make consistently good progress across year groups and subjects. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils.
- Some middle leaders are yet to effect and influence the consistent quality of teaching needed so that pupils make good progress over time.
- The sixth form requires improvement. In this phase of the school outcomes are not yet consistently good.
- The quality of teaching within subjects is inconsistent. Teachers' questioning is not yet good enough to extend and develop pupils' ideas. Similarly, not all teachers use pupil assessment information about pupils' starting points or prior learning to challenge them sufficiently. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.
- Pupils' attendance, particularly disadvantaged pupils and boys, is not good enough.
- Some pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive. Consequently, some pupils are yet to take responsibility for their own learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is improving. Decisive action from the executive principal, director of school and other senior leaders has brought about urgent and necessary improvements in the quality of teaching.
- The trust, governors and senior leaders have quickly changed the culture of the school and identified those areas that need the most attention. As a result, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan gives a clear direction of travel for sustained improvement.
- The vast majority of staff are proud to work at North Durham Academy. They believe that leaders support them and use professional development well so that they can improve. Consequently, morale among staff is high.
- Pupils' aspirations are steadily improving because of some well-thought-out spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments.
- Pupils' safety and safeguarding practices are given a high priority and managed well.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the effectiveness and the impact of leadership and management by:
 - keeping a close eye on the impact of leaders' work to accelerate the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils, acting swiftly and adapting strategies where appropriate
 - ensuring that middle leaders have a greater effect on influencing the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes in their subject areas.
- Continue to improve and strengthen the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment, including in the sixth form, so that pupils' progress accelerates, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and the most able, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve
 - teachers make better use of assessment information to plan and set learning activities that challenge pupils sufficiently, and activities build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - teachers check pupils' understanding routinely so misconceptions are identified and dealt with quickly
 - teachers use questioning to probe and challenge pupils to develop, extend and deepen their ideas and understanding.
- Continue to improve attendance and reduce fixed-term exclusions, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and boys, by evaluating existing strategies so leaders are aware of what is having the most effect and those that need to be changed or amended can be in a timely manner.
- Improve pupils' attitudes to learning so that they are equipped with, and demonstrate, the skills and self-assurance necessary to contribute positively to their own learning and progress over time.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The executive principal, alongside the director of school and other senior leaders, have maintained the urgent pace of improvement observed during the visits that inspectors have made since the school was designated as having serious weaknesses. As a result, senior leaders' decisive actions to address a legacy of poor teaching has paid off. However, leadership and management require improvement because the improvements evident in the quality of teaching have not yet translated into all groups of pupils achieving well over time. Leaders are yet to ensure that teaching across the school is consistently good.
- Historical staffing turbulence has taken a toll on pupils' outcomes, particularly in mathematics and science. However, the executive principal, director of school and governors continue to address these issues with vigour and, in the main, the school is staffed with specialist teachers in the majority of subject areas.
- The executive principal and director of school's strong leadership, high expectations and ambition for staff and pupils in the school are having a significant, positive impact on changing the culture of the school. Staff who completed Ofsted's questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about how well the school is led and managed and the aspirational culture of the school for its pupils. Consequently, leaders have a well-grounded understanding of the school, the local context and the demands facing the pupils in their care.
- Leaders at the most senior level are resolute in their determination to provide the best possible educational experiences they can for the young people. As a result, the inadequacies observed at the time of the previous inspection have been eradicated.
- Senior leaders have a precise view of the areas that need to improve swifter. They are candid and honest. As such, these qualities are reflected in the incisive school self-evaluation document and school improvement plan.
- The school improvement plan continues to be a useful, reflective, tool to steer leaders' work. It is used well to monitor and review the work of leaders to date. However, leaders acknowledge that some areas, particularly focusing on the progress and attendance, of disadvantaged pupils, require a closer eye. Nonetheless, senior leaders' strategic planning is realistic in mapping out the journey for long-term sustainable improvement.
- Middle leaders' skills have developed since the previous inspection. The vast majority of middle leaders share a common sense of purpose and focus on raising standards. Middle leaders are aware of improved lines of accountability and they understand the importance of ensuring a consistency and equity in the quality of teaching across the school and within their subject areas. However, some are yet to effect change with rapidity and affect the quality of teaching in their subject areas. Consequently, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes are not improving at the same rate in all subjects.
- Pupil premium funding, in the past, has not been used to best effect. The commissioned pupil premium review in March 2018 played a key part in refocusing

leaders' ideas and actions. As a result, the focus is now on ensuring that funding is used well to improve disadvantaged pupils' attendance, outcomes and experiences. Current funding is being used better, for example appropriate measures are in place to raise the attendance of specific pupils. Leaders are now focusing on targeting funding with precision, so that it has a positive impact on the progress of all disadvantaged pupils across Years 7 to 11. Despite improvements, leaders still need to ensure that they evaluate and adapt strategies more swiftly so that demonstrable effect can be achieved.

- The leader of special educational needs (SENCo) is ensuring that reviews are timely and targets set are realistic and challenging, taking into account individual pupils' needs. Over time, the outcomes of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities have been variable, although there are some individual success stories. Support for pupils is variable and not all teachers are well versed in deploying support staff well. As a result, current pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make variable progress. However, those who have an education, health or care plan (EHCP) are making better gains in their knowledge and skills.
- The curriculum plays an important role in developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills. For example, in music, dance, physical education (PE), science and English pupils were encouraged to be cooperative, democratic, creative and consider moral implications linked to sensitive issues.
- A wealth of extra-curricular opportunities, including homework clubs, sports fixtures, drama performances and involvement in charity events, are on offer to pupils. Such additional opportunities benefit pupils as they develop and encourage them to be responsible citizens.
- Leaders do not shy away from seeking additional support, particularly around improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders welcome this support and are open to new ideas and external scrutiny of their work. In some instances, leaders have adapted and amended plans appropriately to strengthen their strategic work.

Governance of the school

- Governors are ambitious and committed to the school. They bring a wide range of skills and experience which they use in abundance to support and challenge leaders at all levels.
- Governors have accessed relevant training. They undertake their responsibilities with pride and rigour. As a result, their ability to influence change is high. They ask searching questions where underachievement is evident, and they challenge leaders and the school to do even better. As a group, they are fully immersed in the strategic planning and direction of the school. For example, they are consulted regarding the school's self-evaluation document and school improvement plan. As a result, they can stringently probe leaders about the effect of their work on improving standards.
- Trust members demonstrate a strong understanding of the school and they are very clear about the strategic and operational role they play. They are acutely aware of how their responsibilities differ from the local governing body. This is because there is a

clear scheme of delegation in place.

- The trust board is experienced, and they share the governors', the executive principal's and the director of school's high expectations and ambition. They are passionate about raising standards. They provide governors and leaders with appropriate resources, support and challenge. The trust demonstrates extensive capacity to improve the school and drive standards up further.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a well-placed culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are trained well, and governors are well informed about aspects of safeguarding. Regular updates and information are provided so that everyone is kept up to date about any concerns or issues.
- The senior leader who is the designated safeguarding lead is well informed about all aspects of safeguarding and provides strong leadership in this important area. The safeguarding team maintain robust records and have a detailed understanding of pupils' needs, particularly the most vulnerable in the school.
- The school has effective links with other appropriate safeguarding agencies. Policies and procedures are up to date and effective in ensuring that there is a vigilant culture across the school.
- The procedures for appointing new staff and checking their suitability are thorough. The school's single central record is exemplary.
- The majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that their children were happy and feel safe at school. The vast majority of pupils spoken to during the inspection echoed this view, as they commented how they feel safe and they know whom they can turn to if they have a worry or issue. Pupils were also confident that if they had a concern, staff would deal with it quickly and effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because it is inconsistent across subjects and for different classes within subjects. As a result of this, pupils' progress is also inconsistent. However, there is evidence of good practice that can be built upon and shared more widely, for example in English, music, dance, PE and modern foreign languages.
- While the overall quality of teaching is improving, not all teachers have high enough expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. This is largely down to, too often, teachers not using pupil assessment information well enough when planning learning and activities. Consequently, the level of challenge for pupils who have different abilities and different starting points is not consistent or high enough, and this is especially the case for the most able pupils.
- Some teaching does not build well on what pupils can already do, know and

understand, particularly disadvantaged pupils. These pupils are capable of much more. In some instances, teachers do not capture pupils' misconceptions and errors quick enough. Where this is the case, gaps in knowledge and understanding remain and pupils' progress is hindered.

- The use of questioning is variable. Although teachers are developing their use of questioning, it does not routinely require pupils to develop or extend their ideas. In some instances, questioning does not demand enough from pupils and opportunities are scarce for them to think deeply about a topic or concept.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers are using the school's planning sequence to good effect. However, the delivery of the lesson content is variable. Where it is most effective, pupils learn well and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills at a good rate.
- Strong learning is clearly evident in some subjects. For example, there were examples of well-planned activities contributing to pupils' confidence, skills and knowledge over time, particularly in some year groups being taught English, history and technology during the inspection.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Some pupils do not take enough pride in their work and do not know, or show, how to be successful learners. Some pupils do not take responsibility for their own learning and, as a result, this limits their own progress and learning.
- The school takes great care of pupils, especially those who are facing challenges and are vulnerable. The great majority of pupils are proud of their school and feel they are well cared for and looked after.
- Pupils spoken to during the inspection proudly demonstrated high levels of respect and tolerance for anyone who was 'different'. Pupils at North Durham Academy firmly believe that difference should be celebrated, and everyone treated with equality.
- The school deals with any incidents of bullying in a timely manner so that pupils feel safe. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were well informed about what they needed to and should do if they or anyone else was being bullied. They have a sound understanding of and know that any form of bullying is wrong. Pupils themselves told inspectors that if bullying did occur, staff would deal with it promptly and effectively.
- A small proportion of pupils attend bespoke alternative provision. Leaders are in regular contact with the providers and they thoroughly check the quality of safeguarding, provision and pupils' attendance and outcomes.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have acted quickly to deal with issues around

historic low standards regarding behaviour. Standards of behaviour have improved across the school and expectations of pupils' good behaviour have been raised. In the last academic year, this resulted in high levels of exclusion. However, so far this academic year, exclusions have reduced significantly. This is because leaders' insistence on high expectations of behaviour has paid off. Staff deal with the fewer incidents of poor behaviour far more effectively. When pupils' behaviour deteriorates, it is largely down to the fact that their attention wanes because they are not challenged sufficiently in their learning.

- In the main, pupils behave well in lessons and around the school site. They behave sensibly, safely and generally show respect for each other and for adults. The school environment is calm and orderly.
- Leaders acknowledge that for some pupils their attendance is not good enough. Some pupils are persistently absent, despite leaders' best efforts to engage with parents and implement different strategies to promote high levels of attendance. Although such strategies have brought about some individual improvements, attendance for disadvantaged pupils and boys remains higher than the national average for all pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, pupils' attainment and progress have shown inconsistent improvement. Nonetheless, current pupils are beginning to catch up, with some achieving well because of stronger teaching. Even so, outcomes still require improvement because they are inconsistent within subjects across the curriculum and for different groups of pupils. Pupils do not make consistently good progress.
- Over time, pupils' progress and attainment has been highly variable in mathematics and science. Historic weaker teaching and staff absence contributed to pupils' underachievement in these subject areas. Although showing signs of improvement, the progress of current pupils in these subjects is still not consistently good. There is too much variability in achievement because pupils are not consistently taught well in these subjects.
- In the past, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have lagged behind those of other pupils nationally. Leaders' close monitoring of disadvantaged pupils is providing them with valuable information, which demonstrates that the gap is diminishing steadily. However, pupils' progress still varies from year group to year group. Some teachers use specific strategies to target and accelerate disadvantaged pupils' progress and learning, where this is the case the gaps are diminishing more rapidly. This is particularly the case in English. However, variability in other subjects remains.
- The current progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is also variable. The support these pupils receive is inconsistent. There are some individual cases where pupils have made better gains in their knowledge and understanding over time. This is a similar picture for the most able pupils in the school. In some instances, challenge for the most able pupils remains insufficient, and consequently they do not achieve what they are capable of.
- School assessment information, supported by a large number of observations of learning and work in pupils' books, indicates that, while still inconsistent, current pupils

are making better gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding over time. However, leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do to accelerate rates of progress for disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils.

- In Years 10 and 11, current pupils are beginning to catch up because of leaders' planned additional support sessions, which are bespoke and specific to pupils' gaps in learning and knowledge.
- While outcomes are not yet good, pupils are adequately prepared to cope with the next stage of education, training or employment.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The 16 to 19 study programmes require improvement because they do not ensure yet that students make consistently good progress.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is inconsistent between subject areas. This is because assessment information is not used consistently well to plan learning that meets the needs of students. As a result, teachers do not sufficiently challenge all groups of students.
- Despite some improvement to provisional outcomes for academic courses in 2018, such improvements are in their infancy. Students have achieved well and continue currently to achieve well over time on vocational courses.
- Students are able to participate in work experience. Work experience placements are bespoke to students' long-term ambitions and provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to embark on their future aspirations and career pathways, while developing their confidence.
- As part of students' individual study programmes, they take part in a wide range of enrichment opportunities in order to develop their personal and social skills. For example, students have worked with younger pupils to develop their reading skills, engaged in organising charity events and events for the local community to participate in, such as coffee mornings. Such opportunities build on the efforts in the main school to develop students' social and moral skills.
- Information, advice and guidance students receive is a strength. As a result, the vast majority of students go on to sustained education, employment, training or apprenticeships at the end of their study programmes.
- Leaders have made sure that, despite small numbers, all the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes are met.

School details

Unique reference number	136745
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10053680

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 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	869
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	17
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mr John Widdowson (Chair of Trustees) Mrs Christine Warren (Chair of the Governing Body)
Principal	Mr Kevin Reynolds (Executive Principal) Dr Gary Ankers (Director of School and Curriculum)
Telephone number	01207 292180
Website	http://www.northdurhamacademy.co.uk/
Email address	info@ndacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 May 2017

Information about this school

- The school is a broadly average-sized secondary school.
- The school is part of the New College Durham Academies Trust. Since March 2017, the school has had an executive principal who provides leadership across the two secondary schools in the trust, North Durham Academy and Consett Academy.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend the school and are supported

through the pupil premium funding is well above that found nationally.

- The vast majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who require additional support is similar to that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who have an EHCP is above average.
- The school uses three alternative provision providers, where a small number of pupils are placed. Some access the provision on a full-time and some on a part-time basis.
- Since the previous inspection, the number of students in the sixth form has reduced considerably. There are now only 17 students on roll. The trust, governors and school leaders are currently in consultation regarding the future of this phase of the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 49 lessons, across a wide range of subjects and year groups, both in the main school and in the limited sessions taking place in the sixth form provision.
- A number of observations were completed jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed an assembly and pupils' conduct at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors held various discussions with senior leaders, other leaders and class teachers. The lead inspector met with a group of governors, including the chair, the chair of directors for the trust and three other trust directors.
- Inspectors also met with six groups of pupils, ranging from Years 7 to 13. Inspectors spoke with a number of pupils informally and in lessons.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in classrooms and they also completed separate work scrutinies of pupils' work in mathematics and science. Discrete work scrutinies took place to evaluate work in the sixth form and for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Inspectors considered a wide range of information provided by school leaders regarding the achievement of current pupils in the school.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation provided by the school. This included: the school's self-evaluation document, improvement plan, documents relating to safeguarding and child protection, including the single central record, and behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors took into account the 82 responses to the questionnaire for staff and the 92 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 23 comments made using the free-text service. No pupils completed the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Darren Stewart, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sara Crawshaw	Ofsted Inspector
Joanne Owens	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Crossley	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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