

Northumberland CofE Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135886
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	381950
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2012
Lead inspector	Marianne Young HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2,428
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Rory Wilson
Executive Director (Acting)	Dr Mike Pitkethly
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional Inspector
Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector
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Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 56 lessons taught by a similar number of teachers and they gathered further evidence from short observations of learners receiving additional support. Meetings were held with the Acting Executive Director, the principal directors of secondary, primary and the centre, primary leaders, staff, groups of learners and members of the governing body representing both sponsors of the academy. During the inspection, inspectors observed the academy's work and looked at a range of documents including those relating to learners' progress, self-evaluation, improvement planning and safeguarding. Inspectors considered questionnaires returned from learners, staff and 475 parents and carers of which 186 were received from parents and carers of learners in the secondary phase.

Information about the school

The academy opened in September 2009 comprising, originally, nine different sites; it is co-sponsored by The Northumberland Estates (representing the Duke of Northumberland) and the Diocese of Newcastle. In March 2012, the Josephine Butler Campus opened with learners and staff moving to it from several of the previous sites so that the academy now covers five sites. The vast majority of learners are White British. The proportion of learners known to be eligible for free school meals is more than twice that found nationally. Similarly, the proportion of learners who are supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is twice that found nationally. Learners in the sixth form study a number of courses at Advanced Supplementary, Advanced and BTEC level. In 2011, the academy did not meet the government's minimum floor standards for primary schools, but did meet the government's minimum floor standards for secondary schools.

This all-age academy comprises five primary schools for learners aged 3-11, a secondary school for learners aged 11-19 and a 100 place centre for learners who have been identified with profound and/or multiple learning difficulties or with severe learning difficulties. There are currently 85 learners in the centre. The academy received a monitoring visit in May 2011 and was judged to have made good progress in raising standards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- Northumberland Academy provides a satisfactory education for its learners. Variation in the quality of teaching and leadership between the phases are the key reasons why the judgement is not yet good. The quality of education is, however, better for learners in the primary phase and in the centre. Senior leaders have overcome many barriers over the past three years to join a range of disparate schools together. They have communicated their vision successfully to learners, staff, parents and carers and the wider community so that initial reservations and concerns have mostly disappeared. Parents and carers of learners in the primary settings, particularly, have been reassured that individual identities have been retained while enjoying the considerable benefits of belonging to a large organisation. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Attainment is improving across the academy, despite being particularly low in mathematics. The improvement is as a result of senior leaders focus on improving, throughout the academy, teaching, the curriculum provided for learners and in raising expectations of staff and learners alike. Overall attainment is satisfactory despite some learners not making the expected progress in English and particularly in mathematics.
- Inspectors judged teaching and learners' progress to be stronger in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the primary and the centre compared to that in the secondary phase, but satisfactory overall. Learners' needs and abilities are well known, particularly in the centre and in the strongest lessons. The key features of these lessons are that they are well planned, engage learners, provide high quality marking related particularly to examination criteria, therefore, learners can make good and occasionally outstanding progress. However, this quality of teaching is not evident throughout the academy, particularly in the secondary phase.
- The sixth form is satisfactory. Examination results in 2011 demonstrate an improving picture compared with the previous year when progress was inadequate and achievement was low. Learners have mixed views about the academy but welcome the additional opportunities provided for them out of lesson time. Leadership is now firmly

established and this, combined with a secure data tracking system to identify individual learners' progress, is contributing to an improved picture.

- Inspectors observed behaviour at all the sites and talked with different groups of learners. They all agreed that behaviour was much improved since the academy was formed. A zero tolerance approach was introduced which is generally accepted by learners who recognise the need for an orderly society. Attendance rates are improving, particularly in the primary phase, overall, they are still below average. A small minority of parents and carers, who responded to the questionnaire, had concerns regarding behaviour, both around the academy and within a few lessons, but generally were positive about all other aspects of their children's education.
- Directors, phase leaders and the members of the governing body have rightly made improving teaching their top priority. Regular in-house professional development programmes are held and where issues are still evident, action, through performance management arrangements, is taken. Developing literacy has been a key focus across the academy within different subjects; this same drive has not been given to developing numeracy. Consequently, senior leaders are well aware that current attainment and progress in mathematics throughout the academy and within the secondary phase in particular, is limiting learners' life chances.
- Inspectors confirmed that senior leaders have an accurate view of provision within the academy. Middle leaders' expertise varies and they bring less clarity to their evaluations. This is particularly evident when considering how different actions, particularly relating to the quality of teaching, will impact on the progress and attainment of all learners.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and progress urgently in English and particularly in mathematics by:
 - providing additional support, especially for the leadership of mathematics in the secondary phase, where needed
 - monitoring closely the progress made by all groups of learners in these subjects and ensure that at least average proportion make the expected progress
 - ensuring that literacy and numeracy feature in all lessons throughout the academy so that learners can develop these skills regularly in all subjects.
- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better across the academy by guaranteeing that:
 - lessons are planned carefully using the available information about learners capabilities so that they are engaged, make use of all available facilities, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and reach their potential
 - learners understand what they are to learn in lessons and how they are to get better because marking is rigorous and informative
 - all lessons interest and engage learners so that any potential disaffection is eradicated.
- Raise attendance further, especially for learners in the secondary phase.

- Strengthen the capacity for further improvement and reduce variation in leaders' ability to monitor and evaluate their area of responsibility by:
 - enabling all leaders to understand how to monitor, evaluate and indicate how to bring about change effectively using measurable indicators
 - evaluating more effectively the impact of actions, including judging the quality of teaching, on the outcomes for different groups of learners across the academy
 - ensuring that observations of teaching focus on the progress made by learners and does not concentrate mainly on the mechanics of the lesson.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Almost all children enter nursery with skills and experiences that are low for their age. Due to improvements in provision, teaching and the use of assessment they make good progress in their learning and enter Key Stage 1 with broadly average levels of ability. Alongside a strong focus on developing early reading and writing, an innovative partnership with the National Health Service and Newcastle University has been developed to hasten children's communication, literacy and language development. These actions are helping to narrow the gap between children's achievements in these areas and other aspects of the curriculum. Leaders are aware that some of the Early Years Foundation Stage settings are not as successful as the best. This is particularly evident in the use of the outdoor area because insufficient consideration is given to this resource when activities are planned. In 2011, attainment at the end of Year 2 was broadly average, however, for learners at the end of Year 6 attainment was significantly below in English and mathematics. All learners made inadequate progress and not enough of them made the expected progress, set by the government in both English and mathematics. A key reason for this was due to the lack of time leaders had had to tackle the history of underachievement. Inspectors observed that actions taken to improve attainment and progress are bearing fruit.

Inspection evidence from lesson observations, the academy's meticulous learner-tracking data and book scrutiny show that current learners are attaining satisfactorily and often make good progress in lessons. This is particularly the case for learners in Years 2 and 5 because teaching is generally stronger for these year groups. Learners read regularly, however, inspectors noted that understanding text, reading with enthusiasm and applying new words in conversation, were often underdeveloped. Intervention work, for learners at risk of falling behind, is used regularly and consequently the gap between boys and girls attainment is closing. Better identification of learners who have particular learning needs in mainstream classes is ensuring that they too make similar progress to their peers.

Learners in the centre achieve notably well in their communication skills because of the many opportunities provided for them by well trained staff, for example, using signing and enabling learners to make imaginative use of reading materials. However, less attention is paid to the development of numeracy. Overall attainment for all learners is low, but their progress is good.

Progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 in 2011 was inadequate. Consequently, the proportion of learners who attained five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and

mathematics was significantly below that seen nationally. However, some national measures showed that learners were attaining at least the national average and in some respects significantly above. Nevertheless, progress in mathematics is a concern to leaders and inspectors saw evidence of improved performance from this year's cohort. It is, however, unlikely, despite improvements, that the academy's challenging targets, particularly for this subject, will be met. Attainment was also low in the sixth form in 2011 with similar performance in both Year 12 and 13. Leaders provided data to inspectors, and this was confirmed during observations, that the current students are making satisfactory progress, despite attainment remaining low overall. Learning throughout the academy was best when teachers' input was clear, enabled learners to be involved in challenging and exciting activities. Inspectors saw lessons in the centre and also during an English lesson where learners' responses challenged by their peers, discussion flowed with some learners supporting others to do their best; the work was accurately pitched and well planned, so learners' progress was rapid. When inspectors saw lessons dominated by teachers, learners became passive, occasionally off-task. Nevertheless learners generally remained cooperative, but took little part in lessons and waited for the bell to signal a change.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching varies. The strongest teaching was observed in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the primary phase and in the centre. The weakest teaching is in the secondary sector where, despite strenuous efforts to bring about improvements, a small but significant proportion remains inadequate. An important characteristic of the better teaching was seen particularly in the centre where learners' needs and capabilities are fully considered when lessons are planned. They are delivered with imagination and use strategies to underpin behaviour management successfully. Strong support is provided by teaching assistants and expectations are high. Such aspects strengthen the strong strand within the centre where teaching fosters learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Other key characteristics of good teaching are engaging learners in their work, teachers' providing instant feedback so that any misconceptions or difficulties are immediately overcome and questioning is used judiciously. In addition regular and helpful marking celebrates what learners are doing well and indicates how they can get better. All these characteristics were evident in a lesson for Year 5 learners and consequently, they displayed interest, concentration and ambition to do well. Information and communication technology (ICT) was seen being used very effectively in a religious education lesson which captured learners' interest and encouraged their reflection and consideration of different faiths.

Too often though, these characteristics were not present in enough lessons. Satisfactory teaching often displayed the mechanics of each lesson, for example, indicating objectives for the lesson. However, learners were not involved sufficiently and teachers took brief answers from a few volunteers and paid little regard to marking and ensuring learners achieved their potential. Challenge for all learners was undemanding and their interest and enthusiasm waned and, as identified by a few parents and carers, some low-level disruption occurred, particularly in the secondary sector. Activities in the primary phase and in the centre, to improve learners' literacy and communication skills, are taught regularly. However, occasionally teaching again focuses too much on the mechanics of literacy and not strategies to inspire learners' enthusiasm for writing and creativity.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A very small minority of parents and carers have concerns about behaviour within the academy. Inspectors found there to be significant strengths particularly that of children's behaviour in the Early Years Foundation Stage, primary phase and learners in the centre. In the latter setting, learners are friendly, helpful to each other, especially during practical activities and they display good levels of self-discipline which contributes well to their attitudes in lessons. Senior leaders have taken a very firm approach towards developing positive behaviour and have set out their expectations clearly. They have successfully melded very diverse cultures into one and learners expressed to inspectors their confidence that issues were dealt with immediately and bringing valuable instruments into the academy was now common place. Learners appreciate their new surroundings and their uniform is worn with pride and provides a sense of belonging. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of learners subject to fixed term and permanent exclusion within the academy.

Attendance is improving and is broadly average within the primary sector. Rewards and immediate contact with parents and carers are proving successful. Although attendance is improving within the secondary sector it is still below average and particularly so for learners in Year 11. Most parents and carers who responded to their questionnaire had confidence in leaders' ability to keep their children safe and to deal with any kind of bullying effectively. This view was supported by learners in conversation with inspectors. However, inspectors noted that younger learners' perception and understanding of prejudice-based bullying was limited.

Leadership and management

Since the previous monitoring visit there has been considerable change within the academy with schools amalgamating and movement to new buildings. The academy has managed these effectively while ensuring that its traditional values and strong ethos, reflected in their statement, 'Inspiring achievement, encouraging compassion', are prevalent at all times. Senior leaders are fully aware that much has been accomplished but in the key areas of teaching and core skills, much more work is needed. Although inspectors saw clear signs of improvements, these are not yet fully embedded and impacting on the end of key stage tests and examination results.

The roles and responsibilities of directors and primary leaders are well defined. Primary leaders and leaders in the centre relish the impact of the recent restructure which has afforded them more accountability and autonomy so that the unique character of their establishment is maintained. They and their teachers are held to account robustly for their learners' achievements through a regular cycle of monitoring and evaluation. Self-evaluation is accurate and leaders provide appropriate development plans with targets for improvement regularly identified and measured. The ability of staff and learners to move between primary sites is used when necessary, to ensure all learners have equal opportunities to achieve their best and consequently some gaps have been narrowed. These strong features are not so evident in the secondary sector where a number of staff are at the early stages of developing their leadership skills. There is no permanent leader of mathematics at present and this is hampering development in this important subject. Where secondary leaders' experience is limited, this is impacting adversely on their ability to evaluate performance and provision in different subjects. Senior leaders recognise that the current method used when teaching and learning are observed, particularly in the secondary sector, results in overgenerous grading. The current forms guide those observing towards considering the

actions of the teacher and not the progress made by learners during lessons when determining grades.

The curriculum for learners in the centre is linked closely to practical, real life activities and enhanced with a good range of external visitors and visits to different places which support their cultural awareness well. Within the primary phase, all requirements are covered, and the curriculum is designed to reflect the individual nature and the names given to each site. The off-site curriculum for secondary learners is well planned and contributes well to the achievement of the learners involved in this programme which is monitored regularly. A wide range of additional activities are evident with good levels of uptake across all year groups, particularly in sport. Although literacy links and development is well planned in the primary phase and the centre, literacy, together with numeracy development throughout the academy, is underdeveloped for secondary learners.

Since its inception, developing the academy and integrating schools into five sites, including some new building, has been a key focus for members of the governing body. Their attention has been focused on financial, building and logistical issues. Members of the governing body who come from the diocese have been particularly instrumental in challenging leaders to improve attainment and progress across all parts of the academy. Sharing responsibility and developing roles more equably is now recognised as the next step forward. They have, however, ensured that members of the community are kept informed about the academy and every effort is made to involve them when ever possible. In addition, members of the governing body ensure that safeguarding has a high priority and at the time of the inspection, all current requirements were met.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 May 2012

Dear Learners

Inspection of Northumberland CofE Academy, Ashington NE63 9FZ

Thank you for making me and my colleagues welcome when we inspected your academy recently and a special thank you to those of you who spoke to us throughout the two days. We took account of your view and also that of everyone who completed the different questionnaires. We have judged that Northumberland Academy is providing you with a satisfactory quality of education, including for those of you in the sixth form. I managed to visit most of the sites and was made aware of the unique character of each, both seen in the work you do and also in the different names for each primary site. Many of you told us about the improvements, including the new buildings and said that the atmosphere and behaviour, particularly on the Josephine Butler site, has improved considerably. We found you to be polite, friendly and helpful. It is good to see that your attendance has improved. However, it is still low for those of you in Year 11.

You know that attainment in both primary and secondary settings is lower than average and that not enough of you make the progress expected, particularly in mathematics. Not doing well in mathematics and English makes it difficult for you to get jobs when you leave the academy or to study some subjects in the sixth form. We have asked that improving your skills in these subjects is done regularly and is part of all lessons. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get many different and exciting things to do, however we observed that they do not always make full use of learning outside and we have asked for this to happen. Those of you, who have your lessons in the centre, do well, help each other and are given good support by adults when you need it.

Senior leaders and members of the governing body are very ambitious for the academy and are working hard to improve weaknesses. They have a clear understanding of what needs to be done so that you can all make the progress of which you are capable. Consequently, improving teaching is important and we have asked leaders to ensure particularly that lessons are planned carefully, your work is marked so that you understand how to improve and that you are all involved in your lessons and don't be tempted to 'switch off'.

We hope that you will continue to work hard and enjoy all the additional opportunities provided out of lesson times.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

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