

St Aidan's Church of England Academy

Hundens Lane, Darlington, DL1 1LL

Inspection dates

16–17 January 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Achievement is not rising quickly enough in many subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Not enough teaching is consistently good or better. Consequently, learning and progress, and thus achievement, are not good.
- Teachers' expectations are sometimes too low. Information about what students can and cannot do is not always used to plan work that is suitably challenging for all students.
- Teachers do not always share criteria for success effectively with students and students cannot tell for themselves how well they are learning.
- Marking does not always tell students clearly enough how they can improve their work.
- Although behaviour is improving, it is not good enough, especially in lessons where teaching requires improvement.
- Leaders and managers have not brought about improvements quickly enough.
- Middle leaders are not sufficiently involved in checking the quality of teaching and students' progress in their areas.
- Leaders do not always focus enough on the learning that is taking place when judging the quality of teaching.
- Not all teachers know how to improve their teaching to maximise students' learning.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers have, however, brought about improvements in many areas since the previous inspection.
- The percentage of students gaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C has improved on previous years. Students' achievement is good in many vocational subjects.
- Attendance has improved and is average. The number of exclusions has reduced.
- The school has put in place some effective initiatives to improve reading. These are beginning to show impact.
- Students enjoy their school and believe the new Principal will help them to do even better.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 34 teachers teaching 34 lessons. Four observations were conducted jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and carried out analyses of students' books and other work.
- The inspectors looked at a number of documents, including those relating to safeguarding, child protection, development planning, the monitoring of the quality of teaching and information about teachers' professional development.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and with students.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and also with the vice-chair, who are both representatives of the academy's sponsors.
- The 14 responses to the on-line questionnaire, Parent View, and the 40 responses to the staff questionnaire were analysed.

Inspection team

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Alison Thomson, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Lynne Horton | Additional Inspector |
| Catherine Laing | Additional Inspector |
| Anne Smedley | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- St Aidan's Church of England Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is much higher than average.
- Most students are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students supported by school action is above average. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- A very few students are educated off site at The Vox Centre and Nacro Darlington, both of which provide opportunities in vocational education and opportunities for students to develop personal and social skills.
- The academy enters students for some GCSE examinations earlier than usual.
- The academy has specialist status in business and enterprise.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The school converted to academy status in September 2007 and moved into its new building in September 2009. Sponsors are the Church of England and David and Anne Crossland.
- The academy has recently achieved the Investors in People gold standard award.
- A new Principal started in January 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all teaching is consistently good or better to raise achievement by:
 - using information about what students can and cannot do to give each of them work that is pitched at the right level to challenge them appropriately
 - providing students with clear criteria for success that relate to learning so that they can check for themselves throughout their lessons how well they are learning
 - always marking students' work with clear comments on how they can improve it and checking that they are responding to this feedback.
- Improve aspects of leadership and management to bring about improvements more quickly by:
 - developing the roles of middle leaders in effective monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and of the progress that students are making in the areas in which they lead
 - always having a close focus on the learning that is taking place when observing lessons to judge the quality of teaching
 - focusing more on personalising teachers' professional development to help each teacher know clearly how they can best improve their teaching to maximise the students' learning and progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students enter Year 7 with below-average attainment and many have low literacy skills. They leave at the end of Year 11 with attainment that is still below average on some indicators, including the percentage that gain five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Progress in many subjects is not yet good and so achievement requires improvement. This is true for all groups of students, including those who are eligible for pupil premium funding and those who are disabled or have special educational needs.
- Standards in many vocational subjects are above average and achievement is good. This has contributed to the academy's five A* to C GCSE results being above average for the last three years.
- Students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding have in the past not performed as well as their peers. However, the gaps in performance did close by over 20% for those gaining a grade C or better in English and in mathematics between 2011 and 2012. The academy's data for this academic year indicate further closure. Strategies such as residential revision weekends and small-group tutoring are having a good impact.
- Students are entered early for some examinations. This motivates them to work hard early in their courses and is leading to improved outcomes in some subjects, for example in mathematics.
- Current progress in most subjects is rising and in some it is good. This was confirmed from the academy's own data, students' work and by lesson observations. In many lessons seen students made good or better progress. These included a Year 11 mathematics lesson and a Year 10 information and communication technology (ICT) lesson. These lessons included opportunities for students to work together, which they did successfully.
- In some lessons students do not make sufficient progress, as the work is often the same for all and is not challenging enough for many.
- The progress for students educated off site is mostly good, with some gaining higher grade GCSEs.
- Literacy skills are improving through a focus on basic communication skills in lessons (CReW). In addition, strategies to improve the reading age of underachievers have resulted in an average gain of 26 months in reading age over a nine-month period.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching over time requires improvement, although the academy's records show that teaching is improving. The inspectors saw some good and outstanding teaching but also some that was inadequate.
- In the majority of lessons students are given a good range of activities that engage them well. The best lessons have clear criteria for success and teachers encourage students to use these to check how well they are learning. This was exemplified well in a Year 11 drama lesson on the epic theatre and the Brechtian style of acting. Here students knew clearly how well they were learning and what they needed to do to achieve more highly.
- In lessons where progress requires improvement less attention is given to checking how well students are learning. Sometimes the work is not well matched to the abilities of all students or does not offer enough challenge. Students recognise that there is sometimes insufficient challenge. When asked what the academy could do to help them to achieve more highly, one student replied, 'They could push us harder'.
- Learning support assistants work effectively with students who are disabled or have special educational needs, both in lessons and in small groups. Sessions to improve literacy skills were observed and students generally made good progress.

- Many instances were seen where students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was promoted well. For example, in a Year 10 history lesson about the Black Death students were encouraged to reflect on social welfare and the role of the church in the 14th century.
- The standard of marking in books is variable, both between subjects and within the same department. There are not enough helpful comments to enable students to improve specific pieces of work, or instances of students responding to feedback.
- The response to Parent View was very low. Parents had mixed opinions on whether their children were well taught or not.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- Inspectors found the students polite and courteous and willing to engage in discussion. Most students behave well, both in lessons and around school. However, a small minority do not behave as well as they might do.
- Students' behaviour can contribute positively to their learning, especially when teaching is good or better. Students are mindful of safety and were seen working safely in practical lessons during the inspection.
- Older students told inspectors that behaviour has improved. They rate behaviour around seven out of 10 and say that rewards and sanctions are having a positive impact. Students have been impressed by the high presence of the Principal around the academy and have welcomed the opportunity to express their views to her.
- About two thirds of parents who responded to Parent View did not agree that the academy makes sure that its students are well behaved. Equally, around 40% of staff did not agree that behaviour is good. However, the academy's records show that incidents of poor behaviour are declining.
- Meetings with students revealed that most feel safe, although some Year 7 students said they felt a little intimidated at times. However, they like the mixed-age tutor groups and say this helps them to get to know the older students better. Students have a very good understanding of all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying, and say that if people are not being nice to each other it gets sorted out quickly.
- Attendance is broadly average. It has improved through rewards and immediate contact with parents. The importance of regular attendance has been stressed well. Exclusions have fallen significantly.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- The recently appointed Principal has a very clear view of the academy's strengths and what it needs to do to accelerate its improvement.
- All staff who responded to the staff questionnaire are proud to work at the academy and know what it is trying to achieve.
- The leadership team has brought about many improvements since the previous inspection, including aspects of student achievement and attendance. The quality of teaching and behaviour, whilst improving, are not yet good.
- Middle leader roles require further development. Currently, middle leaders are not held sufficiently accountable for student progress or for the quality of teaching in their areas.
- Many leaders observe lessons. Inspectors found that there is not always enough focus on the learning that is taking place when judging the quality of teaching. In addition, teachers' training is not sufficiently related to their individual needs to ensure that each teacher knows clearly which aspects of their teaching to develop further in order to improve the impact of teaching on the quality of learning.
- Systems for checking the progress of students are becoming increasingly thorough. Underachievement is being identified and addressed more effectively. Progress is improving for

all groups of students. Gaps in performance between groups of students are closing and this reflects the improving equality of opportunity. Discrimination is not tolerated.

- The curriculum has served the needs of the students well, but leaders now recognise that it is time for some change, particularly around the need to prepare students better to enter higher education. There is a large number and wide variety of clubs and visits on offer. Students told us how much they enjoyed those, for example the chance to be involved in business enterprise ventures. They also appreciate ambassadors from businesses holding mock interviews with them.
- The spiritual aspect of the academy's spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision is particularly strong through the academy's sponsorship. However, the students' cultural development is not as secure, particularly that reflecting the ethnic mix found in the United Kingdom as a whole.
- All statutory requirements relating to safeguarding are met.
- Sponsors of the academy provide effective support through their representatives on the governing body.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body works closely with the academy. It has played a key role in the allocation of the budget, including pupil premium funding, and this is improving the progress of these students. Governors undergo training, including training on the use of data. They have a realistic view of the quality of teaching and know that this is a key focus to improve the academy further. They acknowledge that teacher performance has not always been linked well enough to pay progression in the past and are taking steps to address this. Although the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body are relatively new in post, they have both served as governors for at least five years. They use their experience well to ensure that the governing body holds the academy to account increasingly well for the performance of its students.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| 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

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| Unique reference number | 135314 |
| Local authority | Darlington |
| Inspection number | 402686 |

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

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| Type of school | Academy sponsor-led |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 647 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Sheila Bamber |
| Principal | Catherine McCoy |
| Date of previous school inspection | 27 January 2010 |
| Telephone number | 01325 373770 |
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