

# Excelsior Academy

Denton Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE15 6AF

**Inspection dates** 30–31 January 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Students' achievement has improved significantly year on year and is good.
- The percentage of students gaining five good passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has risen by an average of six percentage points each year since the academy opened in 2008. This was from a very low baseline.
- Teaching has improved and is good. Teachers are very enthusiastic and make learning enjoyable.
- Students are known extremely well as individuals and the courses they take are tailored very well to their needs.
- Students' behaviour is good and they have very good relationships with members of staff and with each other.
- The effectiveness of the sixth form has improved and is good.
- Strong leadership and management have been a key to the academy's success.
- Senior leaders and governors work very well together to drive improvement. They constantly check to see how well students are learning and take very effective action to address any underachievement.
- Staff are extremely positive about all aspects of the academy and say they are very proud to work there.
- The academy's specialism in business enterprise contributes well in developing students' confidence and teamwork.
- Students are most enthusiastic about the academy and talk about being 'privileged' to have so many opportunities. They say that they particularly like the fact that they are respected and listened to.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally teachers do not give work that sufficiently stretches all students.
- Teachers do not always encourage students to think about how well they are learning in lessons.
- Subject leaders are not sufficiently involved in checking teaching and learning.
- Leaders do not always consider how well students are learning when observing lessons to judge the quality of teaching.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 42 lessons, taught by 41 teachers. Five observations were conducted jointly with five different members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, development planning, the monitoring of the quality of teaching and also information about teachers’ professional development.
- Discussions were held with the Executive Principal, the Principals of the academy’s four schools and sixth-form college, other leaders in the academy, the Chair of the Governing Body, who is also the representative of the academy’s sponsor, and with an external consultant who works with the academy.
- The inspectors spoke to many students in lessons, at breaks and at lunchtimes. They also spoke formally to five groups of students on the first day of the inspection and two further groups on the second day of the inspection.
- The inspectors observed a number of students read in lessons, in special reading sessions that the academy runs each day and they also listened to six students read at lunchtime on the second day of the inspection.
- The 17 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and the 71 responses to the staff questionnaire were analysed.

## Inspection team

Alison Thomson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lesley Powell	Additional Inspector
Stephen Rodchester	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector
Peter Eeva	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Excelsior Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium is much higher than average. (This is funding available for students known to be eligible for free school meals, students in local authority care and those whose parents are in the armed forces).
- The proportions of students supported at school action and by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are both much higher than average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and whose first language is believed not to be English is much higher than average.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standards, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- There are no students currently educated off site.
- The academy enters some students early for GCSE examinations.
- The academy opened in September 2008 in new purpose-built accommodation and is sponsored by Irvine Laidlaw. The sponsor's representative is the Chair of the Governing Body.
- The academy is organised into four separate schools and a sixth-form college: Armstrong School, Hadrian School, Jefferson School, Milburn School and Excelsior College.
- The academy has an executive Principal. Each school and Excelsior College have their own Principals.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise achievement through ensuring that more teaching is outstanding and eradicating the little remaining teaching that requires improvement by:
  - consistently giving all students work that stretches them to maximise learning
  - encouraging students to reflect on how well they are learning throughout lessons
  - developing the roles of subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating the progress of students and quality of teaching in their areas
  - ensuring that all leaders always have a close focus on the students' learning when observing lessons to judge the quality of teaching.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students enter Year 7 with attainment that is exceptionally low, particularly so in literacy skills. They make good progress and leave at the end of Year 11 with attainment that has risen but is still below average on some indicators, for example the percentage of students gaining 5 A\* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics.
- Since the academy opened students' attainment has risen at a much faster rate than nationally. The percentage of students gaining 5 A\* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, has risen by 25 percentage points from 2009 to 2012.
- Although the government's current floor standards have not been met, there has been significant improvement in progress year by year. Currently, students at the academy make good progress in all year groups. This is true in all subjects and for all groups of students, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs.
- Students who are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding also make good progress and the gap between their progress and that of their peers is closing. The academy makes good use of the pupil premium money to set up one-to-one and small-group tuition sessions and to afford these students additional opportunities to widen their educational experience.
- 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, across the ability range in mathematics. It does not limit the potential of the more-able.
- A large number of students enters and leaves the academy during the year. This has an impact on the academy's results, with students who spend longer in the academy attaining significantly better.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and has improved. Although students generally do better in Year 12, progress in Year 13 is now also good, particularly in the arts.
- Good progress was confirmed during the inspection in many ways, including lesson observations and inspection of students' books from the current and previous academic year. In many lessons seen, students made good or outstanding progress. A key feature of those lessons was the opportunity for students to work collaboratively, which they did very successfully.
- Progress in reading is good and rapidly improving through daily reading sessions. The inspectors were impressed by the mature way the students discussed aspects of their books with each other, clearly enjoying the activity.
- Students are increasingly well-prepared for their future, as basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy are embedded into many lessons. The academy's business enterprise specialism plays a part here too. Students told the inspectors just how much they enjoy the 'tenner challenges', where they have to come up with a business venture that makes a profit starting with just ten pounds.
- The academy's data show that the progress of students continues to improve this year and that attainment is set to rise even further.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is good and in some lessons it is outstanding. Teachers are extremely enthusiastic and provide a wide range of interesting tasks that engage students well. Who, for example, would not enjoy creating computer animations for websites to sell pizzas on line?
- In the best lessons, students are stretched and encouraged to think about how well they are learning. This was exemplified well in a number of lessons, including a Year 8 English lesson on poetry. Here, students made outstanding progress as they assessed each other's work using very clear criteria for success.
- These features are not present in all lessons and in the few where they were absent,

achievement was not as good as it could be.

- Many lessons contribute well to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Time is built in for reflection and consideration of moral issues. In a Year 9 history lesson students reflected on atrocities committed during the Second World War.
- Teachers generally mark students' work thoroughly with clear comments on how they can improve it. Year 11 showed the inspectors many instances of where they had acted on the advice of their teachers' comments and moved up several grades as a result.
- The Parent View responses and information from the academy showed that parents agree that their children are taught well.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Students' good behaviour and excellent relationships with the staff make the academy a very pleasant and purposeful place in which to learn. The inspectors found the students to be polite and courteous, holding open doors and engaging them in conversation.
- Older students told the inspectors that behaviour had improved rapidly ever since the academy opened. They believe a consistent approach by all their teachers to anyone stepping out of line has helped reinforce what is expected of them. When asked to describe what it was like to be a student at the academy, one student commented, 'It's great because everyone respects each other here.'
- Students have a very good understanding of different forms of bullying and say that the little that does occur is dealt with quickly and effectively.
- The vast majority of staff who returned the questionnaire agreed that behaviour is good. This is also the view of most of the parents on Parent View.
- Students describe their academy as a very safe one. This view was echoed by parents and also by staff. Students have a good understanding of safety issues when using computers and were observed working safely in practical lessons.
- The academy has set a very high priority on reducing absence. Attendance has improved significantly since the previous inspection two years ago. Fixed-term exclusions have also been reduced considerably.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- Leadership and management of the academy have been instrumental for the improved success of the academy.
- Since the academy opened the rate of improvement in progress, quality of teaching, behaviour and attendance has been impressive.
- The Executive Principal delegates responsibility very well to the Principals of the individual schools and the college, yet keeps a very clear overview of how well the academy is doing and what actions are required to keep up the momentum of improvement.
- Systems for checking how much progress students are making are very thorough. Any student who is in danger of not progressing as well as they might do is identified early and helped to catch up well. As a result, any significant gaps between the performances of different groups of pupils are closing. This reflects the inclusiveness of the academy and its intolerance of discrimination.
- Leaders have successfully improved learning by regularly observing the quality of teaching in lessons and by providing staff with training. A comprehensive system of appraisal and performance management has been adopted, which is linked to the pay scales.
- The role of subject leaders requires further development. Currently, subject leaders are not sufficiently accountable for the quality of teaching or students' progress in their areas. Many leaders are involved in lesson observations. However, there is not always enough focus on the learning that is taking place when judging the quality of teaching.

- Staff are extremely positive about all aspects of the academy and many chose to voice just how positive they feel through comments on their questionnaires, such as, 'Excelsior is the best thing to happen to the west end of Newcastle.'
- The curriculum is skilfully adapted to the needs and interests of the students and there are many occasions where it is extended beyond the classroom. There is a wealth of clubs, visits and visitors. Students told the inspectors that they really valued the opportunities they were given, such as having their own arts and crafts business. The wealth of impressive artwork around the academy is one of the features that exemplify the students' very positive cultural development.
- All statutory requirements relating to safeguarding are met.
- The academy's sponsor provides very effective support both financially and by having the Chair of the Governing Body as a representative.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The Chair of the Governing Body works very closely and effectively with the academy and there is no doubt that the governing body has helped the academy to improve. 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 understand that this is a key focus to improve the academy further. They ensure that teachers' pay is linked closely to their performance and hold the academy to account very well.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135423
<b>Local authority</b>	Not applicable
<b>Inspection number</b>	406599

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1157
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	160
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Fair
<b>Principal</b>	Phil Marshall
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 January 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 228 8400
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