

Atkinson House School

North Terrace, Seghill, Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 7EB

Inspection dates 26–27 March 2013

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

- Overall, there are too few students who make better than expected progress from their individual starting points.
- While the school is improving, because of a number of changes which have been introduced by the new headteacher and the revised senior leadership team, these steps are at an early stage of implementation.
- Teaching is of variable quality in the school and not all staff effectively inform students about their current targets or how to improve in their learning.
- The information from pupil progress data is not always used well enough in the school.
- A small percentage of students persistently do not attend well enough, which affects the progress they make.
- The curriculum does not always meet the needs of all students well enough.
- The governing body do not always challenge the leadership team sufficiently enough to improve students' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Parents have trust in the staff and are pleased with the school's work.
- Many students gain a qualification by the time they leave the school.
- Teaching is stronger overall since the last inspection.
- Staff are committed to providing the best experiences possible for all students.
- The majority of students and staff have very positive relationships.
- The majority of students want to learn and develop their skills further. They say they feel happy in school and understand how to keep themselves safe.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed nine lessons, one of which was a joint lesson observation with the headteacher. They also made a number of other short visits to classroom lessons and other learning activities.
- Discussions were held with members of the governing body, pupils, senior leaders and staff. The lead inspector also met with a representative of the local authority.
- A range of school documents were examined including the school improvement plan, the school's data on pupils' achievement, records relating to behaviour, safeguarding, attendance and the minutes of the governing body meetings.
- There were no responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to consider, but the inspectors took account of the school's own recent parent survey and responses from the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Michele Crichton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Pauline Pitman

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Atkinson House School caters for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- All the students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.
- All students are of White British heritage and come from many different geographical parts of Northumberland. Many have been referred by the local authority from other mainstream schools.
- Since the last inspection a new headteacher has been appointed.
- Since the last inspection the school has maintained its number of awards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' achievement and the quality of teaching and learning to be at least consistently good throughout the school, by:
 - ensuring all staff are consistent in their knowledge and use of students' current literacy and numeracy levels, especially in the non-vocational subjects
 - ensuring each student understands through precise written and oral feedback exactly what they need to do to improve their work further
 - ensuring staff set ambitious but realistic targets for all students based on their individual starting points
 - sharing the good practices that already exist in the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers, by:
 - securing a robust system to track students' progress as they move through the school
 - keeping a careful watch on how well teachers provide literacy and numeracy work at the right level for each student.
 - An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- Improve attendance further and reduce the number of students who persistently do not attend school, by:
 - ensuring more students have access to a practical curriculum that engages and interests them, and develops their English and mathematics skills in relevant ways
 - ensuring greater liaison with students' previous schools to gain knowledge on their pattern of attendance and strategies already used.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Overall, too few students make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Additional learning support, including one-to-one support if necessary, can increase their rate of progress in mathematics, reading and writing. This is more noticeable for the students who receive the pupil premium than for other groups and demonstrates the school's commitment to equality of opportunity.
- Students arrive at Atkinson House School with different levels of attainment but many are well-below national expectations.
- Students, regardless of their background or ability, achieve more the longer they are at the school.
- Reading, writing and mathematics are developed evenly across all year groups and this continues into the vocational area of the school.
- Students consistently leave Atkinson House with a range of qualifications. However, they achieve more if they have attended regularly, participated in a practical curriculum and benefitted from some of the good quality teaching that exists in the school.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Consistently good and better teaching is not present across the school. This is more noticeable in the non-vocational area of the school in Year 7 to Year 9.
- Checks on students' learning and progress are not consistently well focused in lessons or in their books. Staff do not use their knowledge of the literacy and numeracy levels effectively enough to inform students how well they are doing and to set targets for what they need to improve further.
- Students' work is regularly marked. Specific oral feedback to students also helps them to improve with a reminder of what was said confirmed in well-written comments in their books or files.
- One outstanding lesson was observed and the school's own records do show this quality does occur on occasions. This is an improvement since the last inspection.
- Stronger teaching shows students' reading, writing and mathematical skills develop in meaningful and relevant ways. For example, in mathematics practical problem-solving such as building a brick wall, or in English by reading and following instructions in vehicle maintenance. Currently only students in Years 9, 10 and 11 benefit from this curriculum provision.
- Additional adults are usually well deployed in lessons to support students. Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are developed equally throughout the school. These subjects are also developed across different subject areas.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour and safety judgement is not higher because of the persistent low level of attendance of a small percentage of students. This affects their progress and achievements at school.
- Students arrive to Atkinson House School at any stage of their learning and at any point in the school year. They have previously been excluded from a number of schools, have a history of non-attendance and have poor attitudes to learning. The inconsistency in their education can make it difficult for students to settle initially.
- Staff create an environment that is supportive but where students must learn there are consequences for their actions. At times a small number of students find the consistency of this

approach from staff difficult to accept.

- Over time, access to a practical 'hands-on' curriculum benefits many students well, which is evident in their behaviour, attitudes, progress and attendance levels. As students mature they learn to monitor their own behaviour. This promotes independence and social skills, and better prepares them for their next steps in education, training or employment.
- It is obvious in surveys taken by the school that parents are pleased with the way their children settle at school and reconnect with learning. Typical comments are, 'Since he's been at the school we can discuss problems. He is maturing and can have a good attitude.', or, 'He is reading at home more. Everything is so different since he's been to Atkinson House. There has been a massive change. He is settled and not as aggressive'.
- Students learn responsibility and say themselves how much they appreciate staff taking the time to get to know them. Also they appreciate that staff allow them to make a fresh start if they lose control of their behaviour.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Overall, the school's leadership requires improvement. This is because of the variability in students' achievements, the attendance of some and the inconsistency in the quality of teaching.
- The more formal curriculum that is used with Year 7 to Year 9 is variable in its success to develop skills. The low-level literacy and numeracy abilities of some students are not always well suited to activities that are predominantly based on academic skills.
- The process for checking the school's performance was previously not robust and was too generous.
- The new headteacher has produced a school improvement plan and introduced a number of changes to further improve pupils' achievements and the quality of their education. These include the recent appointment of experienced teaching staff. Learning walks now take place regularly with the senior leadership team, and scrutiny of students' work files and books are conducted by middle leaders. However, these have only recently been introduced and it is too early to judge the difference they are making.
- Members of the newly formed senior leadership team understand their roles and responsibilities for school improvement.
- The school does not have a simple yet effective system of tracking students' progress, that is known by everyone and that is used well to set appropriate targets.
- Spiritual, social, moral and cultural development for students has positive features. The vocational curriculum meets students' needs well. It supports students to acquire a range of skills including self-confidence, independence and pride in their own abilities. Throughout the school there are visits to a variety of locations to extend students' cultural knowledge. The school takes appropriate steps to tackle discrimination, including racism and sexism.
- The local authority is aware of the areas where the school requires improvement and provides effective support.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance requires improvement because the governing body does not challenge and support the school in equal measure. Its members are committed to the school, attend meetings regularly and ensure that safeguarding procedures are effective. Governors have also been prepared to go through appropriate procedures to tackle underperformance in teaching. However, governors are not so knowledgeable about students' progress and achievement. They are not fully aware of the impact on the pupil premium on students' attainment. Nor do they sufficiently challenge and hold the headteacher and senior leaders to account to improve attainment, progress and the consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.

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	132771
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	406494

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elsie Harvey
Headteacher	Derek Cogle
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2010
Telephone number	0191 298 0838
Fax number	0191 298 0448
Email address	derek.cogle@northumberland.gov.uk

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