

Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy

Birtley Lane, Birtley, County Durham, DH3 2LP

Inspection dates 24–25 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
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 and staff are very proud of their academy. This is illustrated through comments such as, 'It gets the best out of you to reach your potential' from a student, and, 'This is a highly supportive, very positive place to work' from a member of staff.
- The percentage of students gaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C is well above the national average and has been for a number of years. Students' achievement is outstanding in many vocational subjects.
- The progress that students make in English and mathematics is improving and is now good.
- The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The vast majority of students go on to higher education, training or employment.
- Teaching has improved and is good. Students say that their teachers are very supportive and make learning enjoyable.
- Students' behaviour is good and they have very good relationships with members of staff and with each other.
- The senior leadership team and governors work very well together and have helped the academy to bring about rapid improvement in achievement and in the quality of teaching.
- Students' progress is tracked rigorously. Any underachievement is identified early and addressed quickly.
- Students are known very well as individuals and the courses they take are well matched to their needs.
- Students are very appreciative of the wide range of opportunities to broaden their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The academy's visual and performing arts specialism impacts very well on students' communication and confidence.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. A little remains that requires improvement.
- Occasionally, teachers do not use information about what students can and cannot do to give work that is appropriate for all of them to learn as effectively as they might do.
- Students do not always have enough opportunities to work independently or have effective ways to assess their own learning.
- The best practice in teaching is not shared widely enough for all teachers to know clearly how to improve their teaching.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 48 lessons, taught by 48 teachers. Three observations were conducted jointly with three members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors observed the school’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 relating to teachers’ professional development.
- Discussions were held with the principal, other members of the senior leadership team and some subject leaders.
- A discussion was held with two governors.
- Several governors, including the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, are trustees of the academy.
- A discussion was held with an external consultant who works with the school.
- 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.
- The inspectors analysed the 37 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 89 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alison Thomson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jim Hall	Additional Inspector
Brian Hill	Additional Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Additional Inspector
Anne Smedley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Almost all students are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students who are supported at school action is above average. The proportion of students supported by school action or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is higher than average. (This is funding available for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, students that are looked after by the local authority and those whose parents are in the armed forces.) The academy has a number of looked after students and a large group of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The academy enters some students early for GCSE examinations.
- Lord Lawson of Beamish converted to academy status in March 2012. At the time of the previous inspection the predecessor school was judged to be good.
- There have been considerable changes in staffing since the inception of the academy, including some at senior leadership level.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further through ensuring that more teaching is outstanding, and eradicating the little remaining teaching that is not consistently good, by:
 - always using information about what students can and cannot do to plan work that stretches all students appropriately
 - taking advantage of the students' eagerness to learn by getting them to work independently sooner in lessons
 - giving students clear criteria for success in lessons to enable them to understand better how well they are learning
 - sharing more widely the best practice in teaching that exists within the academy to enable all teachers to understand how they can improve their teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the academy with attainment that is broadly average. They make good progress and leave at the end of Year 11 with attainment above that found nationally on several indicators, including the percentage of students attaining five A* to C GCSE grades.
- Previous underachievement in mathematics and English has been addressed well. Students this year are set to leave with attainment that is higher than average in mathematics and at least average in English.
- Students in all year groups make good progress in most of their subjects. This is true for all groups of students, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Teaching assistants help those students to access their work well.
- Students who are eligible for pupil premium funding mostly make good progress and the academy's own data indicate that gaps between their attainment and that of their peers is set to close significantly this year. In 2012 Year 11 students eligible for free school meals were on average one GCSE grade lower in English and in mathematics compared to their peers. This year this difference should be significantly reduced to less than half a GCSE grade in each subject. This reflects the improving equality of opportunity. The academy is making good use of the pupil premium money to set up one-to-one and small-group tuition sessions and to fund educational visits.
- Year 7 catch-up money is used well to give vulnerable and underachieving pupils due to enter the academy additional learning experiences during the summer holiday. This also boosts their confidence.
- Students are entered early for some examinations. The students say this motivates them to work hard from the beginning of their courses and is leading to improved outcomes, for example, in mathematics and English. It does not limit the potential of the most able.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good, particularly so in Year 13. Students do particularly well in vocational subjects, including the academy's specialist subjects.
- Good progress was confirmed during the inspection. In most of the lessons observed the students made good and sometimes outstanding progress. Key features of these lessons to maximise learning were the way in which the work was tailored well to the needs of each student and the opportunity to learn independently. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson students made outstanding progress as they rose to the challenge of working out for themselves how they could tell if they were learning well.
- Progress in reading is good and rapidly improving, through strategies such as accelerated reading sessions. Year 7 students were seen thoroughly enjoying Roald Dahl's *Lamb to the Slaughter* and deducing what the husband said to the wife to get him so annoyed. Students made outstanding progress as the work was matched particularly well to their needs and interests.
- Students are prepared well for their future, as basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy are embedded into many lessons. In a Year 12 hairdressing lesson students made outstanding progress as they calculated the correct dilutions for various types of colouring to achieve the best results.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good overall and in some lessons it is outstanding. Teachers are enthusiastic and provide a wide range of interesting tasks that engage students well. There are examples of innovative teaching, such as a Year 13 history lesson on Elizabeth I. Students debated who should be invited to the queen's dinner party and who should sit next to each other.
- In the best lessons students are challenged and encouraged to think about how well they are

learning. This was illustrated well in a number of lessons, including a Year 12 art lesson on sculpture. Here students made outstanding progress as they critically assessed each other's work.

- These features are absent in a few lessons. Thus, achievement is 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 discussion, reflection and consideration of moral issues. In a Year 10 drama lesson students were observed sensitively portraying the feelings of a family with an autistic child.
- Teachers generally mark students' work thoroughly with clear comments on how they can improve it. Instances of students responding to such comments were seen, although this is not common practice.
- The Parent View responses and information from the academy showed that parents agree that their children are well taught.
- Year 11 students told the inspectors that one of the things they liked best about the academy was the quality of teaching and the support they receive. They described lessons as 'hard work, but enjoyable'.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students describe the academy as very safe. This view was echoed by parents and also by staff. Students were observed working very safely in practical lessons and they demonstrated a particularly good understanding of safety issues when using computers.
- Most students behave well and are polite and courteous. This was seen during the inspection, with students holding doors open and engaging inspectors in conversation.
- Students are keen to be involved in their own learning and enjoy discussions and assessing how well they are doing.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View agreed that the academy helps their children to behave well. Likewise, almost all the staff who returned the questionnaire agreed that students' behaviour is good.
- The students describe their academy as a friendly one and one where behaviour has been good for some time. This was confirmed by scrutiny of behavioural records.
- Students have a very good understanding of different types of bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, and say that the very little bullying that does occur is dealt with swiftly. They say there are many adults to turn to for help and advice.
- Attendance has been consistently above average for a number of years.

The leadership and management are good

- The principal, his senior leaders and governors work effectively to improve students' achievement. There is a determined ethos in the academy about wanting the best for the students and living up to its motto 'Each other and our dreams'.
- Leaders work well together and have ensured that the aspirations of students and teachers are rising. Staff are extremely positive about all aspects of the academy's work and many chose to voice this through comments on their questionnaires.
- Systems for checking the progress students make are increasingly rigorous. 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, including those who are in charge of subjects, 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. However, there is much excellent practice in the academy which is not being shared well enough at present. As a result, a few teachers do not know clearly how to improve their teaching.

- The academy is supported well by an external consultant who has helped to verify the rapid improvement in English.
 - 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 trips abroad and the many hugely popular stage productions. The wealth of impressive artwork around the academy is one of the features that illustrate the students' very positive cultural development and the impact of the academy's specialism.
 - All statutory requirements relating to safeguarding are met.
 - The academy's trustees are relatively new in post but provide very effective support by having the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body as representatives.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body works closely with the academy and is helping it to improve. Governors know the academy's areas for development very well, including that relating to the quality of teaching. Governors undergo training, including training to understand data, and hold the academy to account well for the performance of its students. Governors play a key role in the allocation of the budget, including pupil premium funding, and this is improving the progress of those students who are eligible. They ensure that teachers' pay is linked closely to their performance in the classroom.
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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	137942
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	413383

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,616
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Albert Leaf
Principal	David Grigg
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0191 433 4026
Fax number	0191 433 4027
Email address	lordlawson@lordlawson.org.uk

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