

Northumberland Church of England Academy

Josephine Butler Campus, Academy Road, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9FZ

Inspection dates 22–23 October 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 requires improvement because pupils' progress over time in English and mathematics has not been fast enough, nor have standards been high enough, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Teaching requires improvement because although strengthening overall, the quality is still too variable. It does not promote consistently good learning and progress for all groups or in all subjects.
- Behaviour requires improvement. Pockets of low-level disruption hinder pupils' progress.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Trends in achievement and teaching are inconsistent and leadership has been slow to tackle them.
- Leadership and management require improvement because the quality of subject leadership is inconsistent.
- Checks of the academy's work by middle leaders are not sharply focused on identifying and quickly removing the remaining barriers to pupils' learning.
- Planning at all levels of leadership is not focused sharply enough on the academy's number one priority to raise achievement in English and mathematics.
- Governance requires improvement. Despite a recent more challenging approach the governing body are not fully effective in carrying out their roles and responsibilities.

The school has the following strengths

- In some lessons, pupils make good progress and learn well due to good teaching.
- A consistent focus on teaching communication, literacy and numeracy skills is helping children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to make rapid progress.
- Pupils say they feel safe at the academy and know how to keep themselves safe.
- The executive director is driving improvement across a wide range of the academy's work and the pace has quickened in the last 12 months.
- Improvements to the curriculum are bringing greater academic rigour to the school's work, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- Parents are positive about the work the academy does and recent improvements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice.
- Inspectors visited each campus and observed teaching and learning in 65 lessons taught by a similar number of teachers: over a quarter of these lessons were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors visited literacy and numeracy support sessions for small groups of learners.
- Meetings or discussions were held with the executive director, senior and middle leaders; a local authority representative, and groups of learners. Meetings were also held with the Chair of the Governing Body and members of the governing body including representatives of the academy’s sponsors; the Northumberland Estates (representing the Duke of Northumberland) and the Diocese of Newcastle.
- The academy’s work was observed and inspectors looked at a range of documents including those relating to learners’ progress and attainment, the work of governors, self-evaluation, school improvement planning and monitoring records, and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 41 parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and the academy’s own survey and analysis of parents’ views. Inspectors met with nine parents. Questionnaire responses from 110 of the academy’s staff were evaluated.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the academy’s view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Gina White, Lead inspector | Her Majesty’s Inspector |
| Christine Cottam | Additional Inspector |
| Michael Maddison | Her Majesty’s Inspector |
| Phil Smith | Her Majesty’s Inspector |
| Patrick Feerick | Additional Inspector |
| John Ellwood | Additional Inspector |
| John Pattinson | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- Northumberland Church of England Academy is an 'all through' academy based on six campuses in Ashington, Newbiggin and Lynemouth.
- The academy is much larger than similar schools of its type and has increased since the last inspection. It comprises five primary campuses for learners aged 3 to 11, a secondary campus for learners aged 11 to 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 94 learners in the centre.
- The majority of learners are of White British origin. Approximately one tenth of learners, a much smaller proportion than in the average school, are from a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of learners known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is well above average. The pupil premium is an additional sum of money provided by the government to support children in the care of the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and the children of military personnel.
- The proportion of learners with a statement of special educational need, and those who are supported through school action plus, are much higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils who are supported through school action is above the national average.
- The school provides alternative provision for a small number of secondary age learners at Choysez, a provider of work related learning.
- The academy met the government's minimum floor standards for primary schools in 2012 but did not meet the government's minimum floor standards for secondary schools.
- Since the last inspection a new executive director was appointed in September 2012 to lead the academy. He is a 'Future Leader' and provides support to three other schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is always good or better, and has a striking impact on raising attainment and quickening pupils' progress by:
 - improving the planning of lessons by taking account of pupils' starting points and learning targets for English and mathematics so that lessons are pitched precisely to meet pupils' learning needs
 - checking pupils' understanding during lessons and adjusting and adapting work to ensure that challenge remains high, particularly for more-able pupils
 - ensuring that teachers draw on the best practice in the academy to inspire pupils' learning by making sure tasks are relevant, challenging, and engage pupils' interest to eradicate low-level disruption.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, particularly subject leadership, and in the sixth form, by ensuring that:
 - the work of all leaders results in consistently good quality provision and outcomes in their areas of responsibility
 - high expectations of middle leaders are made explicit to promote consistency and all leaders understand their responsibilities for leading learning, assuring the quality of work and managing staff performance
 - academy improvement plans, at all levels, and for all subjects, are focused on contributing to

raising achievement in English and mathematics

- measures for evaluating the effectiveness of the academy’s work make explicit reference to the impact they are intended to have on pupils’ learning and achievement in all improvement plans
- checks on the quality of the academy’s work take place frequently to identify the remaining barriers to pupils’ learning, and whether measures are working quickly.

■ Improve governors’ understanding of their roles and responsibilities to evaluate the work of the academy by:

- ensuring that senior leaders are held to account and regularly provide information to governors about the aspects of teaching that are improving quickly and what needs further attention
- regularly checking that improvement planning is on track and that actions are making a difference to pupils’ learning
- making clear the expectations of middle leaders so that governors are better able to challenge them over their provision and performance.

An external review of governance is recommended in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Over time, many pupils have not achieved as well as they could in English and mathematics, due to inconsistency in the quality of teaching. Standards in these basic skills have been below the national average by the end of Year 11.
- Pupils' progress during the time they are at the academy, while improving overall since the last inspection, remains uneven and their learning and progress in lessons reflect this picture. The variable quality of teaching throughout the academy has meant that pupils' achievement in English and mathematics has fluctuated.
- More challenging targets have been set and pupils know what is expected of them. Progress is quickening as a result of additional support sessions and focused teaching for individual pupils and small groups. Gaps in secondary pupils' mathematical knowledge are starting to close.
- Pupils read books which are pitched at the right level of difficulty. Pupils, particularly boys, are responding well to the expectations the academy has of them and read regularly in the daily sessions provided.
- Many children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills below expectations for their age and stage of development. They learn quickly, and make good progress in developing their communication, and early literacy and numeracy skills as a result of good teaching and additional speech and language specialist support. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception class is similar to that found nationally.
- Faster progress in reading continues during Years 1 and 2, but improvement is not sustained more broadly and standards and progress at the end of Key Stage 1 are below average. Discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their books show that the more regular opportunities for writing are helping them to develop their skills. Progress is improving across the academy for current Year 6 pupils and attainment and progress are broadly in line with the national average at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The progress and attainment of pupils with special educational needs, and those who are vulnerable, varies across the academy. Pupils who have statements of special educational need or disabilities, who attend the Centre, make at least expected progress from their starting points as a result of good teaching and half of the Year 11 pupils made more than expected progress in 2012.
- The academy's evidence indicates the courses taken by pupils with alternative providers are meeting their needs and helping them to make good progress.
- Over time, almost all pupils leave at the end of Year 11 with qualifications equivalent to at least five GCSEs. However, the proportion who achieve both English and mathematics is low. Increasing numbers of pupils are taking academic courses and the academy does not use early entry for GCSEs.
- The gap in attainment and progress between Year 11 pupils, supported by the pupil premium, and their classmates is closing. The gap, as measured by average point score, is much closer than the attainment gap nationally.
- Information, guidance and support for careers helps almost all pupils continue into education, employment or training at the end of Year 11.
- The attainment and progress made by sixth form students studying AS and A2 courses have improved steadily to reach broadly the national average, however, there is much variability in achievement between subjects. Increasingly students successfully go on to university and the proportion who do so has doubled in the last two years.
- The achievement of the most-able, as measured by the proportion of students attaining the highest grades at GCSE and at A Level, is typically below that usually found. Lessons for primary pupils and sixth form students are generally planned better than for secondary students.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching is too variable. It is stronger in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in primary, and is consistently good in the Centre. In the secondary school too much teaching requires improvement, the key weakness being a lack of flexibility to adapt to meet pupils changing needs.
- In the best lessons teachers have high expectations, plan thoroughly and engage pupils in activities and tasks which match their abilities, provide challenge, and help pupils to make good and better progress. These characteristics are not yet the norm.
- In many of the lessons where teaching requires improvement assessment information and personal targets, particularly those for English and mathematics are not used to pitch the lessons so that all pupils make good gains in their learning. Where this information is used to plan lesson content it supports pupils' learning well and helps them to make better progress from different starting points.
- In the better lessons guidance on how to structure essays and reports helped older pupils and students in the sixth form to meet course requirements in a range of different subjects.
- In some lessons, a 'one size fits all' approach predominates which leaves the most-able pupils unchallenged. These pupils often complete the same worksheets with no additional modification of the task to provide the necessary extra challenge.
- The quality of support by other adults and teaching assistants to support pupils' learning is not consistently good. Senior leaders know this and have plans to increase the impact of additional adults in classrooms. Where good work flourishes, for example, in the Centre, staff are well briefed by teachers, they know exactly what is expected of them and what is expected of pupils' next learning steps.
- Typically teachers are planning tasks that draw upon pupils' literacy and numeracy skills throughout the academy. A consistent approach is taken to presentation of work and daily reading.
- Imaginative and exciting activities to support young children's development of numeracy and literacy skills are evident in many Nursery and Reception classes. The best are purposefully planned to also support children's social and speech development.
- Regular checks on pupils' progress are not a consistent feature in all lessons, particularly in some English and mathematics lessons across all of the academy's campuses. In lessons where teachers regularly check pupils' understanding teachers use a range of effective strategies including questioning, short tests, and paired and group discussion.
- Marking and feedback is taking place consistently across the academy's work and pupils understand the system. The best encourages pupils to respond to teachers' comments, additional tasks or answer specific questions. This approach is starting, in some classes, to create useful discussions about learning between teacher and pupil.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- Behaviour requires improvement because in a few lessons, teaching does not challenge or engage pupils enough. Leaders know that a few Year 7 pupils are not adapting well to the academy's expectations of their behaviour in lessons.
- Pupils are learning to value differences and treat others with respect. A consistent emphasis on doing so is modelled well by staff. Behaviour in lessons and around the different campuses is generally calm and studious. Pupils say that behaviour is typically a little noisier than inspectors witnessed.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are improving. The majority of pupils are keen to do well and see

relevance in the work they are doing at the academy. Increasingly sixth form students' hard work is reflected in the increasing numbers who are successfully getting into universities.

- Exclusions are generally low. Behavioural incidents are monitored carefully. High numbers of incidents reflect a tougher line being taken over breaches to the uniform code. The need to use sanctions, including the withdrawal of pupils from classes to undertake lessons in the internal inclusion unit, is reducing.
- The academy has a significant number of pupils with behavioural needs. Specific support is meeting their needs and established procedures are in place to draw upon specialist services when needed.
- Parents have few concerns about behaviour, but do not always know about the impact of the academy's effective work to tackle bullying and to educate pupils about the different form this takes and why it is wrong. Pupils say they feel safe whilst at the academy and any concerns are dealt with quickly.
- Attendance is improving and is close to the national average. It is monitored well. The actions and support provided to families to help parents tackle persistent absence of their children is helping to improve attendance.
- The academy tracks the attendance and monitors the safety of pupils who attend alternative provision effectively.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the collective impact of leaders' monitoring and review has not led to consistently good provision and outcomes across the age range and across all subjects.
- The executive director provides clear strategic direction and has high ambition for improving the academy's work and the quality of learning. Governors endorse and support his vision.
- Academy plans at a strategic level are focused and coherent but those that underpin them are not. For example, not all plans reflect the contribution that everyone must make to the academy's number one priority to improve pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. The impact that the various actions are intended to have on specific groups of pupils is not clear enough.
- The teaching that pupils experience daily is too variable to ensure that pupils quickly achieve the high expectations of senior leaders. Leaders in the Centre and on primary campuses are taking steps to lead learning, identify the remaining obstacles and quickly tackle them but this is not the case across the academy. Roles in leading learning and responsibilities for assuring the quality of the work of teaching teams are not defined clearly enough, especially in the secondary and sixth form campus.
- The management of teachers' performance has been reviewed by the executive director. He rightly acknowledges that the academy needs to develop a more robust system for developing consistently strong practice across all aspects of its work. Revised procedures for linking performance and salaries and sharpening accountability measures are in hand.
- More settled staffing in mathematics and improvements in the quality of teaching are starting to translate to higher achievement for pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged, those with special educational needs who attend the Centre, and pupils across the range of primary campuses.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the work of the academy. Although some parents praise the difference that improvements are making to their children, senior leaders and governors acknowledge that the academy is on a journey of improvement.
- Changes to the secondary curriculum are increasing academic rigour for pupils and providing better opportunities to accommodate the needs and interests of all. Learning programmes for

pupils attending the Centre and for those attending alternative provision are adapted effectively to meet their needs and ambitions and ensure that they are prepared for independent living and work. The curriculum adequately provides opportunities for pupils' cultural, technical and sporting excellence. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural development and well-being are developed well.

- An increasing range of sporting activities are flourishing supported by primary sport funding and participation is increasing.
- Leaders recognise the importance of sharing good practice and developing effective partnerships to further improve the academy. Much of this work to forge external links is at an early stage. The local authority has had no involvement in establishing links with other schools. However, activity generated by the academy's leaders to share and also to learn from local schools and universities is increasing. For example, external review has helped leaders to evaluate and strengthen practice and this is having a striking impact on children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have become better informed about the academy's work in the last 12 months. Information is being shared and governors' recent training is helping them to get to grips with a wide range of performance data. Governors have clear expectations of the executive director and an understanding of measures and time scales to hold him to account.
 - Reporting makes clear to governors that gaps in performance are closing for some groups of pupils, particularly those who are vulnerable and those who are eligible for pupil premium funding. As a result of recent visits and briefings, governors have a reasonable working knowledge of how pupil premium funding is being spent and the impact and quality of the work taking place throughout the academy.
 - Governors know what is being done to tackle teacher underperformance and programmes to support good teaching. However, they have a less detailed view of the impact this is having on pupils' learning. Governors are unsure of what aspects of teaching are improving quickly and what needs further attention to raise attainment and improve progress; this is because senior leaders are not providing them with this information.
 - Governors are bringing their business and professional skills to bear to question senior leaders more rigorously. Academy plans and key performance indicators focus on improvement in the long term but plans and measures are not well enough developed to enable governors to rigorously check the impact of the school's work in the short term. Governors do not have sufficient overview to enable them to hold middle leaders robustly to account for their actions to improve the quality of teaching. The governing body has not kept the academy's progress in tackling all of the areas for improvement from the last inspection under close enough review.

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 | 135886 |
| Local authority | Northumberland |
| Inspection number | 428906 |

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

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| Type of school | Academy |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 2–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 2,429 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 155 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Rory Wilson |
| Principal | Andrew Day (Executive Director) |
| Date of previous school inspection | 10 May 2012 |
| Telephone number | 01670 816111 |
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