

St Aidan's Church of England Academy

Hundens Lane, Darlington, DL1 1LL

Inspection dates 7–8 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching and students' achievement have declined and are inadequate. In 2014, too few students achieved the minimum expectations for attainment and progress set by the government.
- By the end of Year 11, attainment in many subjects is low. Progress between Years 7 and 11 is inadequate in mathematics and requires improvement in English.
- Disabled students, those who have special educational needs, and the most able students underachieve across most subjects, as do disadvantaged students in mathematics.
- Teaching over time is inadequate. Teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving are too low.
- Teaching does not always motivate or challenge students. Some students become disinterested in lessons; their persistent low-level disruptive behaviour hinders the progress of others.
- A significant minority of students show a lack of respect for teachers and for each other, and a lack of self-discipline.
- Attendance is consistently below average. Too many students are regularly absent.
- Not all middle leaders yet fully utilise the school's systems to track the progress and behaviour of different groups of students, and to check the quality of teaching over time, to ensure all groups of students are doing as well as they can.
- A large majority of parents who responded to Parent View and academy questionnaires lack confidence in what the academy is doing to promote their children's learning and are concerned that issues they raise are not acted upon swiftly or successfully enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal, supported by the governors, is leading academy improvement strongly. They have taken decisive action and made difficult decisions to deal with weaknesses in teaching. As a result, some aspects of the academy's work are now improving, notably in English.
- Senior leaders and governors know the academy's weaknesses and have identified the right priorities to move the academy forward quickly.
- Students receive helpful information to make well-informed choices about their future. A large majority move into education, training or employment at the end of Year 11.
- Students say they feel safe and well cared for through the academy's strong pastoral care systems.
- Around the school, the majority of students now behave in a calm and orderly manner, and there is a positive climate in the dining room at break and lunchtimes.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 31 different lessons, of which three were joint observations with the academy's senior leaders. In addition, inspectors visited five tutor groups at the start of the day.
- Students' work was sampled in lessons, and a separate detailed sampling of work was carried out across Years 9 to 11 in English, mathematics and science.
- Inspectors talked with students about their achievements and to gain evidence about the quality of teaching and students' progress over time.
- Inspectors also reviewed a range of documents, including the academy's own data on current students' progress, planning and monitoring documentation, minutes of governing body meetings, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents pertaining to safeguarding.
- Meetings were held with students, governors, and academy staff, including those with management responsibilities. A discussion also took place with a representative from the Diocese, a sponsor of the academy.
- Inspectors evaluated the 47 responses of parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as responses from parents to the school's own questionnaires. Inspectors also took account of the views of 44 members of the academy's staff through the completed inspection questionnaires.

Inspection team

Andrew Swallow , Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Patrick Hargreaves	Additional Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 44 the Education Act 2005 (as amended), Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. The number of students on roll has declined since the previous inspection.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, eligible for the pupil premium, is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is above that found nationally. The proportions supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, are average.
- A small minority of students are educated at Rise Carr College where they pursue a range of academic, personal and social qualifications.
- No students are now entered early for GCSE examinations.
- In 2013, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school receives support from Whitburn Church of England Academy, and the Family of Church of England Academies in the Diocese of Durham.
- The academy sponsors are the Church of England and David and Anne Crossland.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant staff changes at all levels, including the appointment of new governors.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good, in order to raise achievement across all subjects, especially in mathematics, for the most able students, those with special educational needs and disadvantaged students, by:
 - ensuring all teachers have high enough expectations of what students can achieve, especially the most able
 - using information about what students can and cannot do, when planning activities, to meet their varying needs, and challenge them all to make good progress that is sustained over time
 - planning relevant and motivating experiences that fire students' interest and help maintain their concentration and perseverance
 - ensuring all teachers systematically check students' understanding in lessons and adapt work so that students learn well
 - ensuring all teachers provide regular feedback to students about how they can improve their work, and insisting that they respond accordingly
 - deploying teaching assistants effectively in lessons to enhance individual students' learning.
- Improve students' behaviour in lessons, and overall attitudes to staff and each other, by:
 - ensuring all teachers promote positive relationships and a productive work ethos when they are with students
 - ensuring that the academy's policies to manage behaviour effectively are implemented systematically and used consistently well by all staff.
- Raise students' attendance to at least the national average and reduce the proportion of students that are absent regularly, by:
 - promoting more visibly across the academy, through the academy's website and newsletters to parents,

the importance of regular attendance and its link with good achievement

- working more closely with families whose children are regularly absent from school.

■ Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:

- ensuring middle leaders and managers feel confident, and have the necessary time, to use the academy's systems to track rigorously the progress of all groups of students and address underperformance early, to ensure all achieve equally well
- ensuring all leaders and governors check the progress of disadvantaged students, particularly in mathematics, to narrow the gap between them and their non-disadvantaged peers, both in school and nationally
- refining existing procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, by checking more carefully the quality of students' work over time, and their routine attitudes to learning
- improving the relationship with parents so that any concerns raised are acted upon swiftly and successfully, and they are increasingly confident in what the academy is doing to promote their children's learning.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The Principal has steered the academy successfully through a significant period of turbulence since the previous inspection. During this time there have been a very large number of changes in staffing, at all levels, and a large budget deficit successfully tackled.
- The governing body has been made increasingly aware of students' performance and the quality of teaching. As a result, governors have been active in supporting the Principal to eradicate a large proportion of historically inadequate practice. Although this work is now complete, it has been prolonged and hindered substantially the academy in appointing specialist teachers, new subject leaders, and strengthening the senior leadership team. As a consequence, this has significantly hampered efforts to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection.
- The Principal articulates high aspirations and a determination to create a culture in which high quality teaching and good students' behaviour and attitudes to learning can flourish. Senior and middle leaders show a similar commitment to raising achievement and improving the academy's outcomes. They have identified the right priorities to enhance students' learning and progress, and have introduced appropriate systems to check teaching effectiveness. Much of this work is only recently introduced, and has yet to become embedded in daily routines, and take effect. The Principal, senior leaders and governors are resolved to drive through future required improvements, as a matter of urgency. Their successes show in the strong improvements in the teaching of English. More students are achieving well as a result.
- Not all middle leaders and managers are confident yet, or have the necessary time, to use the academy's information on how well individual students are performing, to pinpoint underachievement early, and to intervene successfully to improve shortfalls in students' attitudes, and in the quality of teaching.
- Similarly, although arrangements to check regularly the impact of teaching on students' learning are in place, they are not refined enough to take into consideration the depth of understanding and commitment that students show to their learning overtime such as through their written work, or the attitudes that they display on a day-to-day basis in lessons.
- Following a period of significant staffing change, the Diocese of Durham, Church of England and independent sponsors have brokered appropriate support to help improve the quality of teaching and to develop subject and senior leaders' skills in checking how well the academy is doing. They have commissioned ongoing perspectives from external consultants and advisers to confirm the overall judgments of the academy about its work.
- New performance management procedures are suitably challenging, and increasing the expectations of all staff regarding the targets they set for students' achievements, as well as for their own practice. Professional development is matched, in most cases, to identified needs. Training draws on the expertise of staff within the academy, as well as those from other schools, and national organisations. It is too recent to impact fully on the work of all middle leaders, many of whom have only just joined the academy, in holding all staff to account. The Principal has overall reliable information about the effectiveness of teaching, to make the right decisions about teachers' movement up the salary scale.
- Leaders and managers do not yet use sufficiently well the information about students' performance, to remove all barriers to learning. As a result, not all have an equal opportunity to succeed. Margins between the performance of disadvantaged students and their peers, are not closing securely in all subjects, especially in mathematics. Senior and subject leaders know that raising the achievement of students with special educational needs, and that of the most able, is a priority.
- The academy's curriculum is currently under review, with more academic subjects introduced to provide greater challenge, and widen future pathways, for many students. At the same time, arrangements to support the move from primary to secondary school, especially for those whose literacy and numeracy skills are not as well developed, are being enhanced. Assemblies, religious education lessons and alternative curriculum days, prepare students adequately for life in modern Britain. They promote the importance of freedom for all individuals, the significance of mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Careers education and advice is effective, and the numbers of students each year who do not continue in education, employment or training, when they leave school, are falling. Off-site learning arrangements are regularly checked, and their effectiveness evaluated.
- An appropriate range of sporting, musical, singing and performing activities, make positive contributions to students' personal development. Visits to museums, theatres and local places of interest, together with Young Leaders and Duke of Edinburgh award schemes, make important contributions to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. These aspects of the academy's work underpin leaders and governors' determination to eradicate all prejudice and discrimination.

- Pastoral care and welfare arrangements are effective, and safeguarding meets statutory requirements.
- Nonetheless, a large majority of parents responding to the academy's questionnaires, and to Parent View, are negative in their views of the academy, largely because of the significant change and unrest in recent times. They are critical of most aspects of the academy's work, including leadership and management, the quality of teaching, how effectively the academy responds to their concerns and provides them with confidence about the progress that their children are making. A large majority of parents would not recommend the academy.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - There have been changes in governance, since the previous inspection, and the quality of information provided by senior and subject leaders, is increasingly detailed, and compared with national expectations. Governors, therefore, have a much clearer insight into the quality of teaching, students' behaviour, and the rates of progress of different groups in all subjects. Minutes of governing body meetings indicate the heightened confidence of governors in asking questions and providing challenge.
 - Governors have perceptive discussions about the value of spending decisions, in particular the allocation of the pupil premium and funding to help Year 7 students with below average attainment to catch-up. For example, they have authorised small group teaching and additional time for adults to enhance students' reading, spelling and mathematical skills.
 - Governors receive appropriate information about the salaries of all staff and decisions pertaining to teachers' applications for promotion. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the effectiveness of the management of teachers' performance across the academy. They have particularly high expectations of the Principal and senior leaders in taking the academy forwards.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is inadequate.
- Too often, too many students disrupt the learning of others in lessons and, on some occasions, show a lack of respect for each other and adults. Not all teachers always strive to create harmonious relationships or to engage students in meaningful, thought-provoking activities and experiences. Many teachers quickly escalate the academy's agreed consequences for misbehaviour, and call for the removal of students from lessons, without really striving to resolve conflict themselves. This results in inconsistencies in the expectations of adults and of students.
- Around the school, many students behave appropriately. They show generally positive manners in the dining areas, at lunchtime and break times, saying how much they appreciate the new snacks and meals on offer and the free drinks.
- While some students admit that a small amount homophobic bullying and racism exists in the academy, they are equally keen to point out that staff are increasingly vigilant and successful in dealing with such issues. Students say that more and more of their peers are keen to take responsibility as house leaders, and school councillors, to help reduce negative attitudes across the academy, and promote the values of patience, tolerance and positive regard for one another.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement.
- An above average proportion of students is regularly absent, particularly students with special educational needs. While in recent years attendance has been steadily improving, in 2014 it declined, and remains below average. Around the academy there are few displays that promote either the values of regular school attendance, nor help students understand the critical links between achievement and future successful careers and lifestyles. Not enough rewards, or celebratory events, mark the importance of punctuality and attending lessons every day. Equally, not all families are pursued rigorously and early enough, as soon as their children begin to attend irregularly.
- Students generally say they feel safe in the academy. Arrangements to keep safe those educated off-site, are checked frequently, and thoroughly evaluated. Students who experience problems, or particular challenges in their lives, say how much they value the pastoral care and welfare provided by key adults within the academy.
- The academy's arrangements to promote students' personal, social and health education, result in the vast majority having a secure understanding of the different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and of how to keep safe.

The quality of teaching**is inadequate**

- High staff turnover, since the previous inspection, has impacted negatively on the overall quality of teaching. It has resulted in students' inadequate achievements over time in many subjects, notably in mathematics. This is seen in the insufficient depth and amount of work completed by many students, and in the low-level disruption of learning in many lessons.
- Teaching does not provide all groups of students with work that consistently gets the best out of them. Too often, teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are too low. Many students do not see the relevance of the learning. As a result, they are not interested enough to think deeply about what they are doing, find it difficult to concentrate and persevere, and lack the necessary motivation to improve their work further.
- Teachers do not systematically check students' understanding carefully enough in lessons, missing opportunities to adapt activities to meet learners' changing needs, and moving many on before they are ready. This is particularly the case for students with special educational needs.
- Often students are set the same work, in the same conditions, regardless of their abilities. Too many teachers fail to recognise that this does not make sufficient demands of the most able students, and therefore, many are not stretched to reach their potential.
- The quality of teachers' marking is too variable. While some provide regular and detailed comments on students' work, others do not mark carefully, or regularly, enough. Consequently, many students do not know what to do next to improve. Many teachers' expectations of students' responses to the comments that they make, are not high enough. As a result, many students do not develop sufficient resilience and desire to challenge themselves to improve their initial contributions.
- Teaching assistants are generally appropriately deployed, but the quality of help and guidance they provide, particularly for students with special educational needs, varies. This is because they are often involved in helping to calm low-level disruption caused by other students in lessons, and are rarely involved in discussions with teachers about the impact of the targeted support they are providing.
- Relationships between students and adults in some lessons, are not always good enough. This ethos does not promote consistency in students' good personal and social development. Behaviour policies are not consistently well applied, and some teachers do not manage students' poor behaviour well.
- Teaching enables some students to make good progress. For example, in Year 7 in technology, high expectations and enthusiasm on the part of a teacher of food technology, stimulated all students to take care and pride in researching and evaluating aspects of hygiene required in food production. Similarly, in a Year 10 religious education session on marriage and family life, most students showed a desire to make connections between strong bonds and relationships with key values, that underpin a thriving society. This was due to the high expectations and challenging questions, constantly provided by the teacher.
- Teaching is improving strongly in English, leading to increasing numbers of students making expected, and more than expected progress.
- The bespoke teaching of small groups of students, outside lessons, is effective in promoting key reading, writing and mathematical skills. In lessons, the vast majority of students experience few difficulties in understanding written materials and using numbers accurately to calculate, measure and represent information in different formats.

The achievement of pupils**is inadequate**

- From students' below average starting points on entry to the academy, they make inadequate progress. By the end of Year 11, the overall standards reached by students over time are significantly below average in most subjects, especially so in English, mathematics, science, technology, history, geography and religious education. As a consequence, students' overall achievement is inadequate.
- While the academy met the government's current floor standards in 2013, attainment declined in 2014, and unvalidated results show that the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE passes at A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has fallen below the government's minimum expectations.
- In 2014, too few students overall made expected progress in English, and particularly in mathematics where too many students underachieved. This is largely because historically, teachers have over-concentrated on ensuring students attain at least a GCSE 'C' grade, at the expense of promoting appropriate rates of progress for all.
- Achievement in mathematics, over time, is inadequate. The proportions of all groups of students making expected, and more than expected progress, by the end of Year 11, are well below those seen nationally. In particular, disabled students, those with special educational needs, the most able and disadvantaged

students underperform. Not enough opportunities are regularly provided for all students to apply mathematical skills to solve problems in relevant, everyday scenarios. Opportunities are sometimes missed by some teachers to take stock of students' changing needs, introduce even more challenging activities, and to insist on greater perseverance, to promote higher outcomes.

- Achievement in English, although now improving strongly, still requires further improvement to be securely good. The proportions of most groups of students making expected, and more than expected, progress, by the time they leave the academy, remain below national expectations. Nonetheless, more and more students show increasing confidence in their work to write at length for different audiences and purposes, order their ideas clearly, and express their views succinctly, due to more good teaching.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs underachieve across all subjects, including English and mathematics. This is because the planned activities are insufficiently tailored to meet their needs, and they have insufficient time in many lessons to complete successfully what they are asked to do. Teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively to support individual students.
- The most able students also underperform. Too few reach the highest grades of which they are capable by the time they leave the school. Their written work often lacks depth and detail, and they are not challenged sufficiently in many lessons to think for themselves, and find solutions to problems.
- Since the previous inspection, disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium have underachieved. In Year 11 in 2013, the attainment of disadvantaged students in English was almost one GCSE grade lower than non-disadvantaged students in the academy, and about one and a half grades behind non-disadvantaged students nationally. In mathematics, their attainment was a whole GCSE grade behind non-disadvantaged students in the academy, and over one and a half grades behind non-disadvantaged students nationally. School data and inspection evidence shows that in English, the margin in the achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers is closing, but is widening in mathematics.
- Appropriate support is made available for students at risk of falling behind. For example, Year 7 catch up funding has been used to provide more one-to-one specialist teaching in English and mathematics, and to enhance students' confidence through bespoke mentoring. The funding has also supported the purchase of new resources to boost students' reading and numeracy skills. The academy's information on the impact of all of these measures is not precise enough to show the degree of improvement to date for all students.
- The academy's information shows that the social skills of the small number of students educated at Rise Carr College improve, with many attaining GCSE passes in English and mathematics. These outcomes are often much lower than their individual targets. This is due to past underachievement.

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	135314
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	442315

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	597
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sheila Bamber
Headteacher	Catherine McCoy
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2013
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