

Ashington High School Sports College

Green Lane, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8DH

Inspection dates

28–29 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Senior leaders have an inaccurate view of the effectiveness of the school and have been unsuccessful in halting its decline. Governors believe the school is better than it is.
- Standards are too low, particularly in English and mathematics. Far fewer students than nationally make or exceed the expected rate of progress in these subjects. As a result, achievement is inadequate.
- Disadvantaged students, those who are disabled or who have special educational needs also make much less progress than they should. This is because gaps in their learning are not identified or addressed adequately.
- The leadership of teaching is inadequate. The school's processes for evaluating the quality of teaching are ineffective and mean that leaders and governors have an overly positive view of the quality of teaching in the school.
- Leaders have not focussed their efforts on improving the quality of teaching in order to raise students' achievement. Performance management arrangements have too little impact.
- Teachers do not demand enough of students and accept too readily students' work that is of poor quality or is incomplete. In too many subjects marking is infrequent and at times inaccurate and does not make it clear to students how they can improve their work.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students do not make good progress in the majority of their courses.
- Attendance, though slowly improving, is still too low. Too many students are persistently absent from school.
- Governors have not effectively challenged the school's leaders and have been too reliant on senior leaders for information on how well the school is doing.

The school has the following strengths

- In a small number of subjects effective teaching helps students to make good progress.
- Students are polite, friendly and respectful.
- Most students behave well in lessons and social times are orderly and calm.
- Students say they feel safe at the school and know how to keep themselves safe.
- The majority of sixth form students leave the school to take up employment, apprenticeships or to enter university.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 as a result of concerns relating to students' achievement and the quality of leadership and management. It was subsequently deemed a section 5 inspection due to the inspection findings.
- Inspectors observed teaching in 28 lessons and part-lessons, four of which were observed jointly with senior leaders from the school. Lessons were observed in a range of subjects and were taught by teachers across the age range of the school. In addition, inspectors watched senior leaders reporting back to teachers on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, vice-principal and other members of the leadership team, the Director of Strategy and Standards, middle leaders, the vice-chair and two other members of the governing body and the Director of Education and Skills for Northumberland local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's view of its own performance, external reviews of performance and standards, monitoring records, information about students' progress, improvement planning, students' books, minutes of meetings of the governing body, records of behaviour and attendance, and records relating to safeguarding and child protection.
- Discussions were held with three groups of students about the quality of their educational experience and the standard of behaviour in the school. Inspectors also spoke with students in lessons and at various times during both days of the inspection.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views through the 58 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). A very high proportion of staff also contributed their views in a questionnaire; 72 responses were received.

Inspection team

David Brown, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector
Kevin Broadfoot	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 44 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- This school caters for students aged from 13 to 18 years old and is similar in size to the average-sized secondary school.
- The percentage of disadvantaged students eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is 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.
- A small number of students attend the Education Other than at School Service (EOTAS) alternative provision run by the local authority.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage and few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is broadly average.
- Few students leave or join the school other than at the beginning and end of the school year.
- The school, in partnership with two first and two middle schools, is part of a 'hard federation trust', known as the Ashington Learning Partnership. The trust has a Director of Strategy and Standards and each school has its own Principal. There is one governing body, but each of the five schools has a small group of governors who work directly with it on behalf of the full governing body. The Ashington Learning Partnership will move from a three-tier to a two-tier system in September 2015 and this school will then cater for students aged from 11 to 18 years old.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so progress is at least good for all students by:
 - ensuring the school sets realistic targets for students and that assessment is used by teachers to plan and teach lessons at the right level for different groups of students
 - ensuring teachers mark students' work more frequently and more accurately so students are aware of the next steps they need to take to improve.
- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that the senior leaders' and governors' evaluation of how well the school is doing is accurate and realistic, and is used to target actions more effectively to bring about rapid improvement
 - implementing a rigorous system to evaluate and improve the quality of teaching throughout the school, using information about students' attainment and progress, and the quality of their classwork and homework, in addition to observations of lessons
 - making better use of performance management to improve teachers' classroom practice and to hold teachers rigorously and robustly to account for students' achievement
 - ensuring leaders and managers at all levels frequently and rigorously analyse the progress that all groups of students are making, taking prompt action to tackle underachievement
 - checking that students who are supported by the government's pupil premium funding receive targeted support that accelerates their progress and narrows the difference in their attainment and that of other students in school and nationally
 - analysing more thoroughly all information gathered in the school, including attendance data, and using this to target actions to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence
 - ensuring governors understand and use a range of sources of evidence on the school's performance to enable them to provide an appropriate level of challenge to senior leaders and hold them to account.

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

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

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

are inadequate

- School leaders have an inaccurate view of the school's effectiveness. Self-evaluation is over generous and is based on an inflated view of students' performance. As a consequence, senior leaders and governors have been unsuccessful in addressing the continued decline in students' progress by the end of Year 11.
- School improvement planning lacks rigour and clarity and is not sufficiently focused on priority actions that will bring about improvement in students' achievement. School leaders reacted too slowly to the decline in students' attainment and progress in English in 2013, to a further decline in English and mathematics in 2014, and to the inadequate achievement of disadvantaged students over the last three years.
- Leaders do not demonstrate the capacity to secure much-needed improvements. Plans for improvement are based on inaccurate judgements as to how well the school is performing. Consequently, school leaders and governors are unaware of the urgent action required to improve students' achievement.
- Senior and middle leaders have an inaccurate and overly-positive view of the quality of teaching. This is because they do not use information on students' achievement to inform their judgements, relying too heavily on observations of teaching in lessons and not enough on understanding the impact that teaching is having on students' learning. Leaders do not check well enough on the quality of students' work, including making sure that work is marked to a consistently high standard.
- Action to improve the quality of teaching is not focused closely enough on the strengths and weaknesses of the school and, as a result, leaders have not done enough to secure good teaching of students and groups of students, including those with special educational needs, disadvantaged students and the most able.
- The support provided for subject and other middle leaders is ineffective. A lack of direction has resulted in individual subjects developing their own ways of working which do not integrate smoothly. Departmental planning does not link coherently with whole-school development planning.
- Systems for managing the performance of teachers are ineffective. Targets are not realistic enough to hold staff to account for students' performance or to drive up the quality of teaching and learning. The link between salary progression and students' achievement is weak.
- School leaders have used the pupil premium money to provide a range of additional support for disadvantaged students. However, they have not checked closely enough on the impact this funding is making or know which strategies are making the most or least difference. The governing body does not challenge school leaders robustly about how this money is spent and the school's website does not meet requirements in the way it reports the impact of this funding.
- The sixth form has improved over the last three years. The guidance provided for Year 11 students ensures that students move on to the most appropriate courses. More students are now successful in their A Levels, they are well-informed and supported on the next steps they want to take, and make a positive contribution to the life of the school.
- The curriculum, including that in the sixth form, has a number of pathways appropriately matched to the needs and aspirations of students at the school and provides suitably for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. An appropriately designed assembly programme keeps students abreast of contemporary local and world affairs and ensures that they are aware of British values.
- The school does not promote equality effectively because there are unacceptably large gaps in achievement and attendance between groups of students, such as those with special educational needs or disadvantaged students and other students both in this school and in the rest of the country.
- Historically, the local authority relied too heavily on the judgement of the previous Ofsted inspection to inform its opinion about the school and, as a result, adopted a 'light touch' approach, despite evidence of a decline over recent years. Attempts to engage with school leaders and governors have been hampered by the school's lack of understanding and acceptance of this decline. The leadership of the school has worked too much in isolation and has not sought enough support to help it to improve.
- The school website does not meet requirements, as it does not report on the impact of pupil premium funding on students' learning and progress.
- The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers without the permission of the monitoring inspector.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have not been effective in challenging the performance of the school. They have taken too much on trust from senior leaders and, as a result, have only recently appreciated the extent of the decline in achievement.
 - Until very recently, there has been little evidence of governors holding the school's leaders to account,

particularly in terms of students' achievement, the quality of teaching and in the performance management of teachers and senior leaders.

- The governing body has been ineffective in making sure the expenditure of the pupil premium has had a direct bearing on improving the achievement of disadvantaged students.
- Governors are supportive of the school and have worked effectively to plan the reorganisation of the schools in the Ashington Learning Partnership.
- Governors ensure the systems for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements. At the time of the inspection, the school met all government requirements in relation to safer recruitment.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Students typically behave well around the school and in lessons. In a small number of lessons weak teaching does not challenge or engage students resulting in behaviour that disrupts learning.
- Punctuality to school and to lessons is good and this reflects well on the majority of students' positive attitudes towards their learning. However, the attendance of students has remained too low since the previous inspection and is not improving fast enough. Too many students are frequently absent from the school. Senior leaders recognise this and have worked to improve attendance but it remains stubbornly low when compared with other secondary schools.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Procedures and policies for safeguarding are fully in place and are reviewed regularly by senior leaders and the governing body. Staff receive appropriate training in managing students' behaviour and in safeguarding. Staff and parents are confident the school keeps children safe and that they are cared for well.
- Students spoken with were able to talk knowledgeably about e-safety and the potential dangers of social media and have a clear understanding of what makes an unsafe situation. They are aware of different forms of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying, and know how to report their concerns if they witness or experience it. Students report that there is occasional use of derogatory language from a minority of students, but when this occurs staff deal with it effectively.
- Students who attend alternative provision have their attendance recorded on the school's system each day and there are effective systems in place to respond to any problems that may arise.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Over time, teaching has not enabled students to make the progress they should in English, mathematics and in several other subjects. There are examples of good teaching in some curriculum areas, but there is too much inconsistency across the school. Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching lack rigour and judgements reached are too generous.
- The majority of teaching is not adapted well enough to suit the needs and abilities of students. As a result, work is often too easy for some students and too hard for others. The targets set for many students are unrealistic and teachers' assessment of students' work is over-generous, leading to students having an inaccurate view of their current performance.
- The quality of marking varies significantly across the school and inspectors saw numerous examples of students' work that had not been marked for several weeks or where marking consisted of only ticks and crosses. When work is marked, the comments provided are sometimes inaccurate. As a result, students' misconceptions are sometimes not picked up quickly enough to ensure that they understand key concepts and so are able to make progress in their work.
- Teaching is not always adjusted to meet the needs of students of different abilities and as a result some lessons are based on all students completing the same task. The weak communication and literacy skills of many students are a barrier to their learning and few teachers have developed effective strategies to improve these. The work set for the most able students does not always challenge them.
- More effective learning is found when teachers focus on what students need to learn. Teachers in these lessons set high expectations for students of all abilities, students respond well and progress is more rapid.
- The 'personalised learning centre' supports the social and behavioural development of students well and

effective assistance from teachers and teaching assistants leads to many students who attend this centre returning to mainstream lessons.

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Achievement is inadequate. Students join the school in Year 9 with levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science that are broadly average. However, too many students make very limited progress in English or mathematics and a significant number of students with attendance or behaviour issues make no progress at all. In GCSE examinations in 2014, overall levels of attainment were significantly below the national average. Leaders, including governors, did not anticipate this decline.
- The achievement of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium is inadequate. For each of the last three years, the average point score reached by students known to be eligible for free school meals in English and in mathematics was equivalent to more than one and a half GCSE grades lower in each subject, per student, than those of other students in the school. The gap between disadvantaged students at the school and other students nationally was two grades in both English and mathematics.
- The most able students have not achieved as highly as they should. Their progress across the school has not been tracked carefully enough and as a result, the work they have been given often lacks challenge. These students do not achieve the A* or A grades they are capable of at GCSE in a wide range of subjects.
- Students with disabilities or special educational needs receive limited additional support in classrooms. However, this provision is not monitored closely enough to evaluate its impact and as a consequence, these students also underachieve.
- The 'personalised learning centre' provides effective part or full-time support for students who are emotionally vulnerable, together with those who have poor attendance or behavioural difficulties. The effective work of staff in this centre has ensured that many of these students return to mainstream classes with improved attendance and behaviour and making better academic progress. However, the small numbers of students who attend external alternative provision make less progress.
- The school has entered a proportion of students for GCSE examinations in mathematics before Year 11. This has had little impact on outcomes for students.

Sixth form provision

requires improvement

- The sixth form offers an environment in which students feel both secure and supported. There are effective advice and guidance systems on entry to the sixth form and successful arrangements for academic and personal tutoring are in place. Those sixth form students who spoke with inspectors expressed the view that they were happy with the guidance they had received in Year 11 prior to choosing their study programmes and the range of courses on offer.
- From broadly average starting points, students' achievement has risen in recent years but is still below national averages in the majority of subjects. Progress is better in vocational courses and retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are above the national average for the majority of courses. Almost all students leave the college to take up employment, apprenticeships or to enter university.
- Although inspection evidence suggests that teaching is more effective in the sixth form than in the rest of the school, it remains of variable quality and, therefore, requires improvement. Students' attitudes to learning are more positive and marking is of higher quality in the sixth form than in the rest of the school.
- There is a good range of academic courses on offer supplemented by an appropriate selection of vocational qualifications. As a result, a much lower than average proportion of students leave the sixth form without achieving a suitable qualification.
- The sixth form curriculum includes a range of vocational courses, aligned closely with employment opportunities in the area, in addition to a well-considered selection of Level 3 academic subjects.
- Effective arrangements are in place for students to retake GCSE English and mathematics if they have not achieved at least a grade C in the Year 11 examination. In 2014, all students who re-sat the examinations in these subjects improved their grade.
- The school meets the government's current 16 to 19 minimum standards.

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	122355
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	452503

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	950
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Smith
Headteacher	Rob Kitching
Date of previous school inspection	19 September 2012
Telephone number	01670 812166
Fax number	01670 855377
Email address	ahs@alptrust.org.uk

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