

Astley Community High School

Elsdon Avenue, Seaton Delaval, Northumberland, NE25 0BP

Inspection dates	13–14 January 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and managers have transformed the quality of educational provision at the school. Resolute and determined, they have maintained a relentless focus on improving standards and tackling weakness.
- Pupils' achievement is good. In the 2015 GCSE examinations, almost every group of pupils made good progress from their starting points in both English and mathematics.
- Improving the quality of teaching has been at the heart of the school's work. Teaching is now consistently good and some is inspirational.
- Pupils enjoy learning. They value and appreciate the care taken by teachers to help them with their studies. Written work is carefully assessed and pupils respond thoughtfully to the guidance.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils are considerate and courteous. They value learning and take pride in their work.
- Pupils are well-prepared for life in modern Britain and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- Relationships between all members of the community are characterised by care, tolerance and respect.
- Learners in the sixth form thrive. They make good progress in lessons and are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some middle leaders have yet to take on their share of the responsibility for driving up standards within their faculties and they are still reliant on senior leaders to carry out this work.
- There remains too much variability between subjects in external examinations.
- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding. As a result, pupils do not regularly make exceptional gains in their learning.
- The attendance of some groups of pupils still needs to improve.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the effectiveness of faculty leaders by:
 - developing their responsibilities and equipping them with the skills needed to take a strong lead in improvement work
 - enabling them to rigorously hold teachers to account for pupils' performance.

- Improve the quality of teaching to outstanding in every subject and in every year group so that in-school variability is eliminated and outcomes are outstanding by:
 - planning learning with an even higher level of challenge and interest so that pupils develop a passion for their subjects, are highly motivated and aim to excel
 - ensuring that exceptional gains in learning are regularly made in lessons.

- Improve the attendance rate and reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent across different groups by:
 - carefully evaluating the impact of the different strategies that have been used in order to bring about sustained improvements.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and governors are unrelenting in their drive to improve every aspect of educational provision. They plan for improvement with precision. They are forensic in their work to raise standards and close any gaps in the achievements of groups of pupils in the school. Commitment to securing equality of opportunity for every member of the school community pervades the school. The Chair of the Governing Body embodied this drive in a clear statement, 'Any gap in achievement is too wide'.
- Leaders and governors have created an ethos of ambition and high expectations together with a culture of respect and care for others. Pupils greatly value the work of their teachers and say extra help is always at hand. They especially appreciate that teachers always check back to see if difficulties have been resolved.
- Leaders are astute in their evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the quality of teaching. They have a sharp understanding of the next priorities for improvement and have brought about substantial improvement since the last inspection. They have underpinned the work of staff through well-focused and carefully designed training so that the changes are secure and sustainable.
- Rapid improvements in teaching have been brought about through increased professional collaboration, dialogue and planning, together with bespoke training and coaching to improve practice. One teacher reported, 'I have been supported with opportunities to develop my subject knowledge and teaching styles by going on specific courses'.
- While middle leaders have been instrumental in improving the quality of teaching, not all have yet taken on wider responsibilities regarding managing the performance of their faculties and holding their staff team to account for the progress made by their pupils.
- The impact of more effective teaching is clearly seen through improvements in the examination results of English and mathematics and especially the improved achievements of disadvantaged pupils. There is however variability in the achievements of pupils in different subjects and some have lagged well behind those of English and mathematics. Recent improvements in the quality of provision in science, history and French are evident in lessons.
- The school greatly values and has benefitted from the extremely strong and effective support it has had from one of Her Majesty's Inspectors who has monitored the school for the last two years and from local authority senior leaders. Over time, this support has developed school leaders and brought rigour to the school's improvement procedures.
- Leaders ensure that all teachers have appraisal objectives that will help them to improve the quality of their teaching and, consequently, pupils' outcomes. These are thoughtfully matched to the experience of staff and their responsibilities within the school. While these targets are highly supportive of the professional development of staff, they are as yet less effective in holding teachers to account for pupils' achievements.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Care is taken to ensure that their needs are well understood and that both pupils and parents are involved in planning for their learning needs. Staff are well-informed and trained regarding how best to plan for and secure good progress for a range of specific needs.
- Leaders and governors carefully manage the pupil premium funding and meticulously plan for its effective use, drawing from national research to help them. They carefully evaluate the impact of different actions and use this to inform future work. Disadvantaged pupils now make progress in English and mathematics at the same rate as others nationally.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strongly and carefully woven throughout the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 9 grappled with the moral issues faced by soldiers on the battlefield. Understanding of local culture is strengthened through a rich programme of visits and trips to local important sites such as Bowes Museum and Holy Island. A strong sense of community and the ability to work in teams is developed through the outward bound programme. An understanding of spiritual matters is enhanced through visits to places of worship in the city of Newcastle.
- Neither staff nor pupils tolerate discriminatory or prejudiced behaviour. Harmonious relationships pervade the school. During breaktime, when conditions outside were freezing and snowy, almost the whole school crowded into the main hall for warmth and there was a calm, quiet, safe and friendly atmosphere amongst all the pupils.

- There is a culture of safety in the school. Pupils say they feel safe and they value the work of the school in helping them to understand how to keep themselves safe.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school is vigilant and watchful in all areas relating to the safeguarding of pupils. Work with outside agencies shows tenacity and determination in securing, wherever possible, the best help available for pupils and their families in times of great need.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors work well with leaders to provide a good balance of both challenge and support.
 - Governors are rigorous in their examination of the school's performance data and have an astute understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are careful to ensure that they complement reports of the school's work with their own first-hand knowledge.
 - Governors have a good knowledge of performance management arrangements and thoroughly analyse evidence so they are able to reward good teaching and effectively tackle underperformance.
 - Governors have taken very difficult decisions in recent times in order to enable the school to function effectively within its financial resources.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers know their pupils well and take care to plan lessons effectively in order to meet their learning needs. They adeptly use a wide range of strategies and, as a result, pupils are interested in and enthusiastic about their learning. This was seen in English, where pupils enjoyed exploring both text and images relating to the characters in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, in order to identify the key features of the ghost story genre. In French, pupils were totally captivated and absorbed in learning as they practised their spoken language by completing grammatically correct sentences to very humorous pictures.
- Learning proceeds at a good pace. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of conduct. Attention was rarely seen to wander. They enjoy the wide-ranging opportunities to develop different skills. For example, in Year 10 pupils practised public speaking in order to improve their debating skills. Guided helpfully by their teacher, they rose to the demands of speaking very clearly and using grammatically correct spoken English while presenting their case. They also learned valuable lessons in providing spoken, constructive and critical analysis to their peers.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to ask challenging questions which demand that pupils think deeply and carefully. Their responses help teachers to quickly identify any developing difficulties and intervene before there is a loss of learning. Highly effective questioning enabled pupils in History to grapple with the difficult question of what constitutes an accurate historical record.
- Teaching assistants provide good and timely support for pupils with additional needs. This prevents barriers forming and avoids pupils falling behind.
- The school demands high levels of literacy from all pupils. Leaders are forensic in their analysis of pupils' strengths and weaknesses regarding reading comprehension, reading fluency and developed skills in writing including handwriting. Once needs have been identified, work proceeds to provide tailored support leading to improvement. Pupils enjoy regular reading activities during form-time and library lessons in Year 9.
- More-able pupils have every opportunity to excel and regularly experience high levels of challenge. In Year 11, talented mathematicians are working confidently and securely at a very high standard within GCSE Further Mathematics, which overlaps with many topics at A level.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are good. Pupils have confidence in their teachers to help and guide their learning, which underpins their good progress seen in lessons.
- Teachers follow the school's marking policy rigorously. Marking of pupils' work is helpful and guides learning. Pupils in turn take careful note of advice and willingly improve their work. This aspect of the school's work is seen consistently across all subjects and year groups.
- Parents are well informed as to their children's progress through regular reports and parents evenings. Parents who have had children in the school over many years say that this aspect of the school's work has improved substantially since the last inspection and continues to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are polite, respectful and caring for one another. They readily take responsibility for their learning and their attitudes are consistently positive. They enjoy learning and most arrive at lessons fully equipped and ready to learn. Pupils take pride in their work, listen carefully and confidently contribute to lessons.
- Pupils are well cared for and value the support they receive from their teachers. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils understand how to keep healthy, both physically, emotionally and mentally. The pastoral support workers provide high-quality additional support to pupils who are especially vulnerable for a range of reasons so that they are able to access learning and make good progress.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe in the school. Parents and staff overwhelmingly agree.
- Leaders take great care to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of the potential dangers of mobile technologies, social media and the internet. Key messages are constantly developed and reinforced as pupils get older. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe from those who have extremist views and seek to influence them. The school is watchful for signs of radicalisation.
- Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare and would never be tolerated in their school. Should events happen, they are dealt with swiftly. They are fully aware of different forms of bullying and those based on prejudice and difference.
- Pupils show respect for their environment. No litter was seen at all, including after very busy breaktimes in the main hall.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are considerate and well mannered. Their conduct around the school is good and they are careful to behave sensibly in crowded corridors. Even when snow fell during the inspection, not a single pupil was seen to show anything other than sensible behaviour.
- No pupils were heard to use derogatory language during the inspection. Pupils say that if it is ever used it is quickly dealt with by staff.
- Low-level disruption is kept in check well and the vast majority of pupils respond quickly to guidance. However, in the very few cases where pupils have crossed boundaries, behaviour records show that the school's systems are effective. In a very small number of cases, the school's firm and appropriate actions have resulted in fixed-term exclusions. However, the proportion of repeat offenders is small and declining.
- Overall attendance and persistent absence are a constant concern to the school. For some pupils who are absent there are legitimate reasons. However, for a small minority this is not the case and the school spends a great deal of time and resource working to engage these pupils and their parents, working closely with external agencies. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, both of real concern last year, has improved substantially during the autumn term as a result of strategies put in place.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Since the last inspection, overall achievement has steadily improved. In 2015 all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, at the end of Key Stage 4 achieved well in both English and mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils who gained five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics was above average and progress made from their starting points was strong.
- The school is acutely aware that achievement in history and core and additional science was not as strong as in English and mathematics and that too few pupils chose to study French. Significant changes in staffing are now resulting in good progress being made in lessons in all years and there is a substantial increase in the numbers studying French in Year 10.
- Detailed and careful examination of internal progress showed that the steady improvements seen in the last two years' examination results are not only being sustained but are gaining in strength as a result of

sustained improvements in the quality of teaching.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs benefit from carefully planned teaching and high-quality support in lessons. As a result they are making good progress.
- The school is determined to see a higher proportion of more-able pupils reach the highest grades in external examinations. Evidence of challenging teaching was clearly seen by inspectors in all key stages. More-able pupils are making rapid progress and this is particularly evident in both English and mathematics in Year 9.
- The progress made by low-attaining pupils is strong and they benefit from opportunities offered to help accelerate their learning.
- The whole-school focus on literacy and reading is bearing substantial fruit as pupils read both widely and often. This greatly improves their ability to access the curriculum and make the good progress seen.
- Almost all pupils enter employment, education or training when they leave school. Consequently, the number not in employment, education or training is very low.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Leaders are ambitious for learners to achieve well. They carefully monitor learners' progress and personal development, seeking to ensure that they are well equipped for the next stage of their education and training.
- In external examinations, learners make good progress from their actual starting points. Leaders and managers are determined to see standards improve rapidly and substantially in both academic and vocational subjects.
- Inspectors saw learners making good or better progress in all subjects as a result of good teaching which at times was inspirational. Learning proceeds at a brisk pace as a result of well-planned, thoughtful lessons where learners quickly gain new knowledge and understanding. Probing, demanding questioning from teachers helps learners to think deeply and carefully about what they have learned. Learners readily challenge each other and very much enjoy learning with their peers. They value the regular and careful guidance provided by their teachers and act quickly on feedback they are given.
- Great care is taken to ensure that learners' study programmes match their abilities, interests, aspirations and career plans. As a result, most learners complete their courses. An innovative early morning 'careers breakfast' programme enables learners to gain insights into a range of professions. This, together with work experience opportunities, supports them in making informed choices concerning future employment.
- Learners applying for apprenticeships or moving directly into employment are well supported. Now that the proportion of high grades achieved at A level is rising, an increasing proportion of learners are gaining places and studying at Russell Group universities. The vast majority of learners who applied to higher education institutions last year gained their first choice. All learners completing their studies in 2015 progressed to higher education, employment or training.
- Learners value the work of the school in helping them understand how to keep themselves safe in many areas of their lives. They know how to protect themselves when using the internet and mobile technology and clearly understand the dangers of drug abuse and extremist ideology. Learners have questioned and re-evaluated their own attitudes as both drivers and passengers in cars as a result of external speakers who have helped them gain a heightened awareness of safety issues.
- An increasingly high proportion of learners who enter the sixth form without GCSE grade C or above in English and/or mathematics now achieve this standard by the time they complete their sixth form studies.
- Disabled learners and those who have special educational needs continue to receive the same high-quality support as in their younger years, which enables them to manage the increased demands of post-16 study well.
- Learners are motivated to do well and work hard. They are courteous, polite and friendly. They are generous with their time and willingly help younger pupils in the school with their learning. Learners are enthusiastic about the range of opportunities available to them in the sixth form. They enjoy taking part in a wealth of sporting activities and the Duke of Edinburgh Award but would like more opportunities to be involved in the performing arts and music.

School details

Unique reference number	122374
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10002053

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	574
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	163
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Dungworth
Executive headteacher	John Barnes
Head of school	Annette Rhodes
Telephone number	01912371505
Website	www.astleyhigh.org
Email address	reception@astleyhigh.org
Date of previous inspection	23–24 October 2013

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language.
- Overall the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils whose learning is supported by the pupil premium is broadly average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or children looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards.
- The school is in a hard federation with Seaton Sluice and Whytrig middle schools. The three schools share one governing body and the same executive headteacher.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons across a range of subjects and year groups, including a joint observation with a senior leader.
- They met both formally and informally with different groups of pupils and talked with them about their learning.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, the head of school, and senior and middle leaders. They also met with the Chair of the Governing Body together with other governors.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a member of the school improvement service at Northumberland local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including performance management documents, minutes of governing body meetings, monitoring of teaching and progress information. They examined safeguarding and child protection documentation, attendance data, records relating to behaviour and documentation available on the school's website.
- They spent time observing pupils' behaviour in and around the school during breaktimes, lunchtimes and during transition between lessons.
- Inspectors took account of the 37 questionnaires completed by staff.
- They also took account of the 36 responses to Ofsted's online 'Parent View' questionnaire together with 19 written comments. They also examined the school's own parental surveys.

Inspection team

Janice Gorlach, Lead Inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Nicholas Horn	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Welford	Ofsted Inspector

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