

St Aidan's Church of England Academy

Hundens Lane, Darlington DL1 1LL

Inspection dates

11–12 February 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- GCSE examination results are not good enough. They reflect considerable underachievement.
- All groups of pupils in the current Year 11 have underachieved in the five years they have been in the academy.
- A minority of pupils do not take enough care with the presentation of their work or their handwriting.
- Writing at length in several subjects apart from English is relatively weak.
- Teaching requires improvement because there are too many instances of low expectations of pupils, and teachers not fully following the academy behaviour or marking policies.
- In a minority of lessons pupils become restless because they are bored.
- The setting of homework in Years 7 to 9 is not organised well enough. Its potential for raising attainment is not being fully realised.
- The attendance of pupils is still below the national average and persistent absence too high. This affects the progress that pupils make.
- The academy does not give enough assistance to temporary teachers and non-specialists to enable them to ensure that their pupils make enough progress.

The school has the following strengths

- In a very short time, the new Principal has made a massive difference to the quality of education that the academy offers.
- The current Year 11 pupils are doing much better than the 2015 cohort and are on track for higher GCSE results in many subjects.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 10 are generally making adequate or better progress in most subjects.
- There is a fair amount of good and occasionally outstanding teaching that is helping to accelerate pupils' progress.
- Teaching is improving rapidly and so pupils in all year groups are doing much better than previously.
- The information that the academy produces on progress of all groups of pupils is organised in a highly effective manner. It immediately identifies underachievement and triggers interventions to counteract it.
- Attendance has improved substantially.
- The newly appointed senior team is beginning to be very effective in assisting the Principal to raise attainment and improve teaching.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement to consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that GCSE results rise to at least national average levels
 - improving the behaviour of pupils in a minority of lessons where they are insufficiently challenged
 - ensuring that all teachers follow fully the academy behaviour and marking policies
 - improving the presentation of pupils' work and, for many pupils, improving their handwriting and writing at length in other subjects apart from English
 - regularly setting homework in Years 7 to 9 to help pupils to master topics they have been studying and to consolidate learning.
- Raise attendance figures to at least the national average by putting greater emphasis on reaching families where pupils are persistently absent.
- Provide more senior and middle management help and advice for temporary and non-specialist teachers to enable them to prepare effective lessons.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The Principal, appointed soon after the last inspection, has substantially improved the academy into a place where pupils can learn far more effectively than previously. She is passionate about being able to provide pupils with the best possible quality of education and ensure that they all reach their full potential. In a relatively short space of time she has ensured that behaviour, teaching and pupils' progress have all improved. She has very effectively challenged weak teaching and has carefully appointed a senior team of good calibre. Improvements are tangible, fast and appreciated by the pupils.
- Development planning focuses strongly on improving teaching and raising achievement. Intended improvements materialise quickly because managers check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress with relentless efficiency.
- The academy uses its pupil funding effectively to provide extra assistance for disadvantaged pupils, ensuring that the gaps between their performance and that of other pupils are closing at pace.
- The management of teaching is very effective. Managers know exactly where the strongest and weakest teaching occurs. They provide coaching and support plans for most who need them. Performance management is robust and works well to enable all members of staff to improve their work. However, there is still insufficient support being provided for temporary and non-specialist staff. This means that the quality of their teaching frequently falls below the standard sought by the academy.
- The infectious enthusiasm of the Principal rubs off on to members of staff at all levels of seniority. Although changes have been rapid and underperformance challenged robustly, staff morale is good. Middle managers, many recently appointed, are beginning to very effectively assist the Principal in leveraging up pupils' attainment and rates of progress.
- The good promotion of equal opportunities means that all pupils are regarded as individuals with different needs, both personal and academic. Effective monitoring of pupils' social development and academic progress enables managers to put support packages in place for those who need them. A good example of bespoke support lies in the recent assessment of and provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability.
- A well-thought-out curriculum enables pupils to make increasingly better progress in a wide range of subjects. Good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is skilfully embedded into the curriculum and the extra-curricular opportunities that the academy offers.
- The academy prepares pupils relatively well for life in modern Britain. By the time they reach Year 11, pupils can speak with confidence about Christian values, democracy, other religions and the dangers of radicalisation. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to experience at first hand a variety of places of worship. Year 11 pupils are all clear about the courses they intend to follow in the next stage of their education and demonstrate the personal characteristics that employers seek.
- Since the previous inspection, the academy has suffered from negative views circulating in the locality and particularly amongst parents. The Principal, pupils and their teachers are desperate to promote a far better and more accurate picture of what is being achieved.
- The academy enjoys a very productive partnership with Whitburn Church of England Academy, Darlington local authority and the Durham diocese. Since the last inspection, the very effective support and advice that these partners have given has been much appreciated by the Principal.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Since the previous inspection, the governing body has become far more effective. It now plays a full role in ensuring that the academy continues to improve at a fast pace. It keeps up to date with detailed information about the quality of teaching in all subjects and the progress that pupils are making.
 - Governors probe and challenge when necessary to satisfy themselves that the pace of improvement remains high. They ensure that performance management arrangements are effective and that any salary progressions are fully merited. They give valuable support to the Principal when difficult decisions need to be made to eradicate weak teaching.
 - Governors increasingly understand the data that the academy provides on pupils' progress. They are keen and enthusiastic in their quest for providing the best possible quality of education.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet statutory requirements in all respects. Record keeping is good and the arrangements for checking on the identities of all adults who have access to pupils are excellent.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **requires improvement**

- Although the quality of teaching is much better than at the time of the last inspection, it still requires improvement because there are some lessons where the management of pupils is insufficiently effective. This is because teachers are not fully implementing the academy behaviour policy; nor are they planning lessons that will grab the attention of the pupils. Consequently, there are several instances of pupils becoming bored and restless in class.
- Lesson planning does not always utilise the excellent data that the academy has on pupils' levels of attainment and so some lessons are pitched at the wrong level: either too easy or too difficult. Sometimes expectations of what pupils can achieve is far too low.
- In subjects other than English, not all teachers are routinely ensuring that pupils develop their writing at length to enable them to tackle GCSE questions which require an extended response.
- There is still work to do in the general improvement of many pupils' handwriting and the presentation and layout of their work.
- Not all teachers routinely follow the academy marking policy and so, in some lessons, the feedback that pupils receive on the quality of their work and how to improve it is limited.
- The setting of homework in Years 7 to 9 requires attention because it does not yet routinely enable all pupils to consolidate and fully master the topics they are studying.
- A far brighter picture is evident in a majority of lessons where pupils make at least adequate and frequently good progress. In these lessons, teachers manage their pupils well and engage them fully. Plenty of learning occurs in the time available because teachers make the work interesting, often drawing on excellent visual examples which enthuse and motivate their pupils.
- Where learning is good, teachers plan well for all of the abilities and individuals in their classes and explain tasks clearly. They insist on good presentation of work and ensure that pupils understand before they move on to new work.
- There are many instances of particularly good and sometimes outstanding teaching, especially in English, mathematics and science. For example, in a Year 10 science lesson on rates of chemical reactions, superb questioning and motivation of pupils led to rapid learning. In many mathematics lessons, especially in Year 11, a strong emphasis on good setting out of answers means that pupils are being well prepared for answering GCSE questions. In a top set in Year 7 English, targeted questioning interested and motivated pupils to learn rapidly about different forms of media. The teachers' high expectations of the academy's youngest and most-able pupils challenged them to reach the highest standards.
- The academy's records of pupils' attainment and progress in all of the subjects they are studying are outstanding. They enable managers to see instantly where progress is good or better and where it is insufficient. Managers increasingly investigate reasons for slippage and put interventions in place to counteract them. An example is the extra classes for some pupils in Year 11 in mathematics and the Year 7 'nurture group' in English.
- Where teachers use the academy marking policy well, pupils receive good feedback on the quality of their work and how to improve it. Frequently, teachers provide pupils with extra exercises to complete to be sure that they have fully mastered the topics they are studying.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **requires improvement**

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils become more mature and self-assured as they move from Year 7 to Year 11. They feel that teachers and their assistants know them well and that they are always on hand if they need extra help or guidance. Many are impressed that the Principal is visible around the academy during the day and that she knows their names.
- Most are proud of the academy and keen to learn.
- The good range of extra-curricular activities, especially sporting, enables pupils to develop additional skills and interests which help them to become more confident.
- Effective levels of supervision when groups of pupils are moving between lessons mean that they are kept safe. Pupils say they feel safe in the academy and that bullying is very rare. They are perfectly confident that if it should occur members of staff would deal with it effectively.
- Pupils confirm that the academy teaches them about all types of bullying, gender stereotyping and homophobic or racist language. They know how to keep safe from potential perils posed by drugs,

alcohol, roads, railways, water, and the internet, if used unwisely. Pupils understand how and why radicalisation occurs because the academy takes effective steps to warn them away from it.

- The academy is taking very effective steps to eliminate exclusions through the provision of its 'school within a school' programme where pupils at risk of exclusion are provided with an effective education until they are ready to return to class.
- Older pupils have a very good idea about what they want to do in the next stage of their education. They know what qualifications they require to enable them to study further in sixth forms or at college.
- The academy ensures that the Year 11 pupils who are educated at Rise Carr College attend well and are kept safe.
- The academy is providing increased bespoke assistance to its most vulnerable pupils, especially those with special educational needs. A recent full analysis of need has very effectively triggered extra help to enable lower-ability pupils to catch up with reading and access work in class more easily than before.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In lessons, the behaviour of pupils is inconsistent. In a minority of lessons, pupils become bored and restless. This occurs when lessons fail to capture their interest, when expectations of them are too low or they are allowed too much time to complete tasks. In these lessons, teachers neither manage their pupils well nor follow the academy behaviour policy.
- Exactly the opposite is the case in a large majority of lessons where pupils conduct themselves well. In these lessons, pupils have respect for their teachers and try hard. Frequently they demonstrate an eagerness to learn and do their best to answer questions in class and complete the tasks they are set.
- Behaviour around the academy outside lessons is good. Pupils move sensibly around the building and move to breaks, lunch or their next lesson in an orderly fashion.
- Pupils are proud of the academy and their appearance and show respect to visitors.
- Pupils' attendance has improved since the new Principal took up her post. It is still below average but the improvement is a key factor supporting the much better levels of pupil progress.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- GCSE examination results in 2015 were far too low and did not reflect even adequate progress over pupils' five years in the academy. The academy did not reach the government's floor targets because pupils underachieved in English and mathematics and considerably more so in other subjects.
- The 2015 GCSE results showed that, for disadvantaged pupils, the gaps in performance between themselves and other pupils in the academy were over a grade in English and mathematics. Compared with other pupils nationally, the gaps were a grade and a half and two grades respectively.
- Current attainment in Year 11, although better than the year before, is still not as high as it should be.
- The pupils in Year 11 who are educated at Rise Carr College have underachieved over time but they are now making better progress as they approach GCSE.
- Some key aspects of pupils' work still require further attention. Many pupils do not take enough care with handwriting or the setting out of their work. This means that their potential for success in GCSE examinations is limited.
- The picture of attainment and progress for all groups in the academy is now improving substantially in response to the Principal's higher expectations of staff and pupils.
- Extra lessons for pupils in Year 11 coupled with better teaching in most subjects means they are overcoming the legacy of previous underachievement. They are on track to do much better than last year's cohort in English, mathematics, science, religious education, geography and design and technology. GCSE predictions, checked out for managers by other local schools, suggest that the academy will exceed the government's floor targets in 2016.
- There is plenty of evidence that the academy's most-able pupils in Year 11 will achieve many GCSE results at A and A*. Their work is often of a very high standard and they express themselves exceptionally well orally.
- In Year 10, the picture is even brighter. Pupils have largely made at least adequate progress from Year 7. Data show that often it is better than that. Again, there is evidence of the most-able pupils reaching the highest levels, particularly in science, English and mathematics where the teaching they receive is uniformly good.

- In Years 7 to 9, all groups of pupils, including high, middle, and low ability, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability, are making generally expected progress in most of the subjects they study. Lower-ability pupils are making good progress in English in the 'nurture group' in Year 7, where they are rapidly catching up to expected levels of reading and writing.
- Typically, pupils join Year 7 with below average attainment. The academy is challenging them to reach at least average results at GCSE. Apart from Year 11, they are on track to meet these targets.

School details

Unique reference number	135314
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10008512

This inspection 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	507
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Davison
Principal	Nicole Gibbon
Telephone number	01325 373770
Website	http://www.staidansacademy.co.uk/
Email address	enquiries@staidansacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–8 October 2014

Information about this school

- St Aidan’s Church of England Academy is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. The number of pupils on roll has declined since the previous inspection.
- Since the previous inspection there have been very many staffing changes, including a new Principal, new senior team and several new heads of subjects.
- Most pupils are White British.
- There are relatively few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and disability is above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those supported through pupil premium, is above the national average. The pupil premium funding is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school does not meet the government’s current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils’ performance at GCSE.
- A small number of pupils in Year 11 are educated at Rise Carr College where they pursue a range of academic, personal and social qualifications.
- The academy sponsors are the Church of England and David and Anne Crossland.
- The academy receives support from Whitburn Church of England Academy, the Diocese of Durham and Darlington local authority.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 26 lessons, including eight jointly with senior and middle managers, and looked at a wide range of pupils' written work, especially in Years 9 and 11.
- They held meetings with the Principal, senior and middle managers, the special needs coordinator, groups of pupils and representatives of the governing body, local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including the academy's review of its performance, development planning, governors' minutes, records of pupils' progress, safeguarding procedures and incident logs.
- They took account of 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), a survey of parents' views conducted by the academy at parents' evening, 29 responses to the staff questionnaire and a recent survey of pupils' views conducted by the academy.

Inspection team

John Paddick, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Morgan	Ofsted Inspector
John Downs	Ofsted Inspector

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