

Northumberland Church of England Academy

Academy Road, Ashington, Northumberland NE63 9FZ

Inspection dates

29–30 September 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and learners

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teachers do not use assessment information consistently well to plan work that closely matches learners' abilities. Learners, including those who are disadvantaged and the most able, do not make consistently good progress across year groups and different subjects.
- Although time is allocated, learners do not always reflect and act upon their teachers' advice to improve their work. Teachers do not insist that learners act upon their insightful marking.
- Too much work in mathematics is repeated and this limits the progress made by learners. Consequently, standards in mathematics are not high enough across the academy.
- Children do not make rapid enough progress in reading, writing and number in the early years. As a result, not enough have the skills they need to make a good start in Year 1.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are below average in reading, writing and mathematics. Learners are not prepared well enough for the increased demands of Key Stage 2.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders, including governors, are ambitious and determined. As a result of their decisive actions, learners' attendance, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and standards at the end of Key Stages 2, 4 and 5 are improving.
- Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes are effective. The large proportion of students who take part in vocational programmes make good progress.
- Learners thrive in the calm and orderly learning environment. They, and their parents, are proud to be part of the Northumberland Church of England Academy community of care.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Speed up learners' progress and improve outcomes further, especially in mathematics and in Key Stage 1, by:
 - ensuring, in accordance with the academy's policies, that learners use the time provided to read, reflect and act upon their teachers' insightful advice about how to make their work better
 - encouraging learners to use the basic skills they have learnt in English and mathematics in all subject areas
 - increasing the opportunities for learners with the most complex educational needs to benefit, both socially and academically, from taking part in a wider range of activities with their mainstream peers.

- Further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what learners can achieve
 - ensuring that all teachers use the information about what learners can do to plan tasks that help all learners, but especially the most able and disadvantaged, to make better and more rapid progress
 - extending teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics
 - ensuring that the practice of all learning support staff is as good as that of the very best.

- Rapidly increase the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the early years by:
 - ensuring that the systems to measure the progress made by children are robust and reliable
 - carefully measuring the impact of activities financed by the pupil premium to establish which ones enable the children to catch up quickly. (Pupil premium funding is additional government funding for learners who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after by the local authority.)

An external review of the pupil premium would have been recommended if one had not been undertaken recently, in March 2015.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive director has worked diligently to instil an aspirational ethos across the whole academy. This is an academy in which relationships are a strength and a culture of respect, care and tolerance permeates every aspect of its work. Leaders at all levels, including governors, are passionate about improving the life chances of learners.
- Leaders have developed improvement plans which identify the right priorities and are tightly focused on improving the outcomes for learners. However, despite appropriate and extensive improvement planning, learners do not make consistently good progress and achieve the highest levels in all key stages. Leaders are not sufficiently thorough in measuring the difference made by their actions.
- Most of the systems to collect and analyse learners' assessment information, the academy's internal 'key performance indicators', are sophisticated and well established. However, the systems used to measure the progress of learners in the early years result in an inflated view of the progress made by children.
- Middle leadership is developing. Middle leaders are increasingly taking ownership of improvement in their areas of responsibility.
- Performance management systems are robust and well established. Teachers' progression up the pay spine is not automatic: it has to be earned.
- Leaders have taken effective action to eradicate the weakest teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved but is not yet consistently good or better.
- All staff new to the academy take part in a full induction process that is led by the academy's executive director. As a result, staff feel well supported. They are knowledgeable about leaders' aims and aspirations.
- Newly qualified teachers, recently qualified teachers and Teach First trainees benefit from a full and well-organised training programme. For example, safeguarding training at the beginning of the academic year included the academy's 'Prevent' duty. These teachers and trainees are well prepared to ensure that safeguarding is effective in the academy.
- Staff value the high-quality continuous professional development and training that is given priority throughout the academy. This development and training is leading to better teaching, stronger discipline and an improved curriculum.
- Pastoral leadership is strong. The coordination of timely and regular additional help, together with effective liaison with outside agencies, leads to improved outcomes for learners. For example, a learner admitted to the academy with previously poor attendance had full attendance throughout an academic year.
- The academy's curriculum is broad and balanced and places a clear focus on personal development. Learners' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are extremely strong throughout the academy. In the first three weeks of the autumn term, a MacMillan coffee morning was held, money was raised for the children's cancer ward in Newcastle and foodstuffs were donated to the People's Kitchen in Newcastle. Learners understand fundamental British values well. For example, to increase knowledge and understanding of democracy and the rule of law, parliamentary candidates visited the academy during the run-up to the last general election and were quizzed by learners. However, the academy's curriculum does not yet ensure that all learners make good or better progress in English and mathematics.
- Extra-curricular sports provision (from girls' rugby and trampolining to the Chariots of Fire running club) is exceptionally strong and well attended.
- Leaders, through a coherent and coordinated approach, have taken effective action to improve both attendance and punctuality throughout the academy.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders give a high priority to health and safety and respond quickly to any concerns raised by parents and other stakeholders. Procedures are clearly identified to parents via the school website. Most parents who expressed their views through ParentView said that their children were kept safe at school.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors provide significant challenge and support to the executive director and his team. All committee meetings and meetings with parents are recorded diligently. Governors carry out their performance management duties extremely rigorously. They have a full awareness of the link between staff performance and pay progression. Governors have an accurate view of both the academy's

improvement journey since becoming an 'all through' academy and the standards learners reach in all key stages. However, governors have an overly positive view of the progress made by learners in the early years and Key Stage 1. Their actions have not ensured that the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged learners and non-disadvantaged learners in the academy, together with non-disadvantaged learners nationally, are closing rapidly. Similarly, governors have not ensured that the most-able pupils achieve the very highest standards at the end of all key stages. Governors have a very good grasp of the academy's finances and ask pertinent questions about spending linked to priorities. Governors are knowledgeable about the additional primary school sports funding and the Year 7 catch-up funding. The catch-up funding is government funding for those students who enter secondary school with below average standards in English and mathematics. Governors have a range of skills that complement the academy's provision. They have established regular visits to check on the work of the academy and report fully on identified strengths and areas for improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, although improving, is inconsistent across key stages. Not all teachers use assessment information well to plan work which closely matches learners' abilities. Teachers and learning support assistants do not always have high enough expectations of what learners can achieve and planning for the most-able learners is not always challenging enough. Learners occasionally become restless in lessons because they repeat work and are not challenged to think deeply to improve their learning.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable in the Centre. Learners make more rapid progress when teachers have a deep understanding of individual learners' complex barriers to learning and use assessment information as a matter of course to inform their planning.
- The teaching of mathematics requires improvement because not all teachers have good subject-specific knowledge. For example, during the inspection, an incorrect method was used to calculate differences in time in a Key Stage 2 class. This meant that the most-able learners were unable to calculate more difficult problems and extend their learning. Learners in Key Stage 3 do not have the depth of basic mathematical skills necessary to be successful in the next stage of their education. Five new teachers in the academy's mathematics faculty have strengthened teaching in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 since the beginning of the current academic year.
- The contribution that learning support staff make to learners' progress is inconsistent across the academy. The most effective are fully involved in every aspect of every lesson. However, in some lessons, learning support assistants spend too much time watching teaching instead of helping learners.
- The systematic teaching of phonic knowledge and skills in the early years and Key Stage 1 is strong. The proportion of pupils who achieve the required standard in the Year 1 phonics check is above average. However, despite additional teaching in small groups, additional speech and language input and some reading at home, not enough learners achieve broadly average or above results in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1.
- Teachers, in accordance with the academy's policies and procedures, mark learners' workbooks regularly. They are diagnostic and crisp in assessing the next steps that learners should take to improve their work. This has led to improvement in the proportions of learners achieving national expectations at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. However, there are significant inconsistencies across the academy in learners' responses to marking. Although learners are given time to read, reflect and act upon the advice of their teachers, some do not do so and miss opportunities to improve their work and make more rapid progress.
- Sixth form teachers know and understand students' individual strengths and areas for development. Results were much improved in 2015 because teachers had high expectations of the students, carefully targeted their planning and provided bespoke tuition.
- Homework is set in line with the academy's policies. Homework is appropriate and leads to improved progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote learners' personal development and welfare is good. Learners' physical and emotional well-being is nurtured from entry to the academy at age 2 to exit from the academy at age 19.
- Learners of all ages are knowledgeable about the different forms that bullying can take. They feel that the academy deals swiftly and effectively with occasional incidences of bullying and infrequent incidences of aggressive or derogatory language. Rare comments such as 'It's so gay' are addressed immediately by staff. Younger learners, following a recent assembly, told inspectors all about the dangers of cyber-bullying.
- Parents are very positive about the support for their children's learning. Parents of learners who attend the Centre feel that they have a very strong and productive dialogue with staff. Staff proactively involve other agencies to support learners' individual needs.
- Learners value the support they receive to understand personal safety, online safety and healthy relationships. Older learners particularly appreciate the work of the campus nurse and the community support police officer. Learners told inspectors that they are cared for, feel safe and know whom to turn to if they are worried. A pupil at one of the primary campuses told an inspector that school 'feels like a family'.
- The most vulnerable learners in the Centre make progress because of the knowledge and skills of their key workers.
- The combined cadet force is supporting the development of employability skills in learners. The cadets are peer mentors for younger learners in Key Stage 3. Cadets exemplify selfless commitment to others, loyalty, integrity, discipline and courage.
- Careers guidance and advice is strong. The academy achieved the Investors in Careers Quality Award in June 2015. Leaders track learners' destinations carefully. There was a very small minority of young people not in education or employment in 2015. The academy continues to work with these young people to secure appropriate destinations.
- Learners appreciate the efforts that teachers make in marking their work but do not always take the time to reflect on the advice and improve their work. The link between effort and academic success is not yet fully understood by all learners.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of learners is good.
- Learners conduct themselves very well in and around the academy. They thrive in a calm and orderly learning environment. Learners show respect to their peers and adults in the academy. They collaborate well with each other and like to share their learning. Learners are pleased to attend the academy and, from Nursery up to the end of Key Stage 4, wear the academy's uniform with pride.
- Incidents of fixed-term exclusions are very low and reducing.
- Attendance is broadly average throughout the academy and is improving due to robust checking and effective action taken by leaders. Leaders are creative in finding successful solutions for individual learners, for example, an early morning home visit made by the combined cadet force sergeant.
- Persistent absence is low in the early and primary years. Persistent absence, although above average in the secondary years, is reducing year on year.
- Learners arrive at the academy on time because punctuality has a very high profile and lateness is followed up robustly.
- The academy's on-site alternative provision is calm, orderly and welcoming. Students attend regularly, enjoy learning, feel secure and achieve well.
- Learners who attend off-site alternative provision make secure progress academically and in their personal development.
- Very occasionally, and usually because the work that is set does not meet learners' needs, instances of restlessness in lessons impede the progress made by learners.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- The outcomes for learners require improvement. Learners do not make consistently good progress across year groups and subjects, but especially in mathematics, in this 'all through' academy because teaching, learning and assessment are not consistently good.
- Children in the early years make typical progress from entering the academy. They do not make enough progress in reading, writing and number skills to ensure that they are well prepared for the increased demands of the curriculum in Key Stage 1.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1, which in 2014 were significantly below average in reading and writing and below average in mathematics, declined further in 2015. Learners make expected progress from the end of the early years. They do not make enough progress to catch up with their peers nationally and they are not well enough prepared for the increased demands of Key Stage 2.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 improved in 2015 and are broadly average. Some, but not all, learners make better than expected progress from the end of Key Stage 1.
- Current assessment information indicates that students in Key Stage 3 are making strong progress in many subjects. However, progress is slow in mathematics in two out of the three year groups.
- Disadvantaged children in the early years make faster progress in the acquisition of communication skills because of speech and language work financed by the pupil premium. The progress made by disadvantaged learners is not consistently good across all the primary campuses in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, the progress made by disadvantaged learners is not consistently good in Years 7, 8 and 9 in English and mathematics.
- The most-able learners, in all key stages, do not reach the standards of which they are capable. Not enough of the most able make more than expected progress. This is true across the range of subjects and particularly true in mathematics.
- Disabled learners and those who have special educational needs make expected progress from their starting points in the Centre and more than expected progress in mainstream classes. However, capable learners in the Centre do not yet access relevant qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.
- Leaders have used the Year 7 catch-up funding well, to improve the reading ages and quicken the progress made in maths, for the small minority of students it is targeted to support.
- There are very few students who study at part-time alternative provision. Comparisons between those students and other students in the school and nationally are, therefore, not statistically valid.
- The academy does not use early entry for GCSE students. Provisional information indicates that the proportion of students gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2015 improved by 17.5% but remains below average. This is also true of the students entitled to the pupil premium and this proportion increased by 26.4% in 2015. These students made more rapid progress than the students in the academy not entitled to the pupil premium.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- From starting points below those typically seen, children make average progress across the early years. Not enough children make the good or better progress necessary for them to catch up quickly in reading, writing and number skills. The proportion achieving a good level of development is significantly below average. Not enough children are well prepared to access the curriculum in Year 1.
- Opportunities provided for children to improve their skills in reading, writing and number are not developed as well as in other areas of learning. In these key areas, teachers' expectations of what children can achieve are not always high enough.
- Leaders have secured some important improvements. They have developed the range and quality of the resources on offer to children in classrooms and outdoors, and this has allowed children to become more independent in choosing their learning. However, leaders have not taken sufficiently effective action to ensure that the quality of teaching enables more children to make the rapid progress of which they are capable. Despite tracking children's achievement on a regular basis, leaders have had an overgenerous view of the progress made by children and this has limited their ability to accurately evaluate and improve the quality of teaching.
- Leaders' decisions to introduce provision for two-year-old children at three of the campuses is bearing fruit. Staff use assessment exceptionally well to identify the next steps in children's learning and plan a

varied range of activities to address them. This has led to rapid gains in children's listening and attention, and they sustain their focus at the level typically expected for their age.

- Leaders have used additional funding for disadvantaged children to provide support for the development of speech and language skills. While gaps remain between the national average and the proportion of disadvantaged children achieving a good level of development, this work is beginning to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers skilfully plan activities that encourage children to think deeply. In a Reception class, children were enthused by the challenge of using materials to protect a dragon's egg from damage. They demonstrated perseverance in testing out the efficacy of their work, collaborated and shared ideas, and made changes so that they were more successful in achieving their objective. The high expectations of the teacher and the appropriately challenging task ensured that the children were engrossed in their learning and made good progress.
- Relationships between children and adults are a strength of the early years. Children are happy and enjoy learning. Adults clearly communicate their expectations and incidents of inappropriate behaviour are quickly and calmly resolved. As a result, children are respectful of adults and their peers.
- Partnerships with families are a strength across the early years. Effective communication in the two-year-old provision between home, school and other childcare providers is making a significant contribution to improving children's progress. A grandparent approached an inspector to say that she could not 'sing the praises of staff highly enough'.
- Children in the Centre make better than typical progress because teachers and learning support assistants liaise carefully with the local authority's speech and language team. The children benefit from bespoke provision.
- The academy has recognised the importance of establishing effective learning habits in children from the earliest age and has introduced a new approach to this across Nursery and Reception classes. Children enjoy the links made to the characteristics of special superhero and dinosaur role models. While this work is in the early stage of development, it is beginning to have an impact on children's enthusiasm to tackle a challenge and to keep trying to achieve success.
- Adults support children well to make safe choices. In an outdoor learning area, a child confidently explained the need to wear special clothing and safety glasses when making a 'potion' using 'alien slime' and 'fairy dust'. Children and parents are appreciative of the care shown by all adults, particularly those assigned to the role of key worker.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Leaders are highly ambitious for students in the sixth form. Effective leadership has brought about improvements in provision and outcomes since the last inspection.
- Study programmes are well informed by students' interests and career aspirations so they are prepared well for the next stage. Students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and attend well.
- Students' progress is carefully checked and individuals are supported well when they need to make better progress. Students who met the inspector were very positive about the time and effort that teachers and other staff put in to helping them to succeed.
- Individualised support and effective teaching ensures that most students make good progress relative to their starting points. Progress is particularly strong on vocational courses but less so for the small proportion of students who follow academic routes. Almost all students are successful in completing the courses that they start and almost all Year 13 leavers progressed into employment, training or education at the end of 2015.
- While there is some success in ensuring that students who enter the sixth form without a GCSE grade C or above in English and/or in mathematics go on to gain these qualifications, leaders acknowledge that this could be improved.
- Mainstream students access a wide range of activities and enrichment opportunities focused on: developing employability skills; preparedness for their next stage; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; and fundamental British values. Students in the Centre do not have enough access to work-related opportunities.
- Careers advice and guidance, utilising in-house and external expertise, is very effective. Students are carefully guided and make informed choices. There is a strong focus on broadening students' experiences and raising their aspirations towards attending high-performing universities.
- Students feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe in situations appropriate to their age. They are

confident in the support that would be offered by staff should they face difficult academic or personal circumstances. Students show a mature respect for others and a tolerance of individual differences.

School details

Unique reference number	135886
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10002059

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

Type of school	All through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of learners	2–19
Gender of learners	Mixed
Gender of learners in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of learners on the school roll	2554
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carole Snelling
Executive director	Andrew Day
Telephone number	01670 816111
Website	ncea.org.uk
Email address	executivedirector@ncea.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 October 2013

Information about this school

- Northumberland Church of England Academy is an 'all through' academy based on six campuses in Ashington, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea and Lynemouth. The academy is significantly larger than the average-sized secondary school, and almost two-thirds of the learners are in the early years and primary phases.
- The academy comprises three primary campuses for learners aged 2 to 11, two primary campuses for learners aged 3 to 11, a secondary campus for learners aged 11 to 19 and a 100-place Centre for learners aged 2 to 19 who have been identified with profound and/or multiple learning difficulties or severe learning difficulties. There are currently 94 learners in the Centre.
- Children in the early years attend the two-year-old provisions and Nursery classes on a part-time basis and the Reception classes on a full-time basis.
- Most learners are of White British heritage and very few do not speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disabled learners or learners who have special educational needs is much higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged learners, those eligible for support through the pupil premium funding, is well above average.
- The academy provides alternative provision for a small number of learners on the Josephine Butler campus and at Choysez, a provider of work-related learning.
- The academy met the government's minimum floor standards for primary schools in 2014 but did not meet the floor standards for secondary schools. Provisional and unvalidated assessment information indicates that the academy met the floor standards for primary and secondary schools in 2015.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited each campus and observed teaching, learning and assessment in 91 part-lessons, 19 of which were observed jointly with senior leaders. The inspectors visited a range of lessons for short periods including groups that support the development of learners' reading and phonic skills.
- Meetings were held with the executive director, senior and middle leaders, four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body and the academy's improvement partner. The lead inspector also met with the Director of Education for the Diocese of Newcastle and Durham and spoke by telephone with the Director of Education and Skills for Northumberland local authority.
- The inspectors spoke informally to learners in lessons, during tours of the academy and at various times during each day of the inspection. The inspectors also spoke formally to nine groups of learners from Key Stages 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.
- Questionnaire returns completed by 78 members of staff were taken into consideration.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of learners' workbooks and information about learners' current progress in lessons. They also reviewed a number of documents including the academy's development plan, attendance records, information relating to the work the academy does to keep learners safe and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Account was taken of the 61 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors also spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

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