

Nunnykirk Centre for Dyslexia

Nunnykirk Hall, Netherwitton, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 4PB

Inspection dates

15–16 February 2017

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 pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, too few pupils have studied, and then taken, nationally recognised qualifications by the age of 16. Pupils' progress in subjects taught has been too variable over time. Progress has been weaker in English than in mathematics.
- Sometimes, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not sufficiently high, particularly for the most able.
- Although governors know the school well and provide strong support to the recent leadership team, their role in challenging leaders for the impact of their work is insufficiently developed.
- Students' outcomes and progress across the 16 to 19 study programmes have been too variable. For example, last year, students' achievements were strong in photography but weak in fine art. Until very recently the range of subjects on offer has been too narrow.
- Recent systems for assessing pupils' progress are being used inconsistently by teachers.
- Delays in developing the infrastructure for information and communication technology is limiting pupils' use and development of skills in this area. It is also hindering the effective management of information and assessment systems across the school.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher and senior leaders are driving improvement rapidly. Their impact can be seen in the broadening curriculum, pupils' hastening progress and the good communication with parents. Parents are highly positive about their children's education and care and the difference Nunnykirk makes to their children's self-belief and achievements.
- The quality of teaching and pupils' progress in English is improving well. New leadership of the subject has brought high expectations and good subject knowledge. This expertise is starting to be shared across the school to raise expectations of all.
- Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination of any kind pervades the school's work. Pupils develop qualities of respect, trust and valuing differences of others within the school and wider world successfully.
- The promotion of pupils' social, spiritual, moral and cultural development is strong. A wide range of out-of-school activities within and beyond the school day enhances the curriculum and pupils' personal qualities well.
- Behaviour is good. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves are exemplary.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards of teaching, learning and assessment across the whole school to enable all pupils to make at least good progress in their learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers use accurate and regular assessments of pupils' current abilities to plan activities that deepen their knowledge and skills and move them on quickly, particularly for the most able pupils
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of what their pupils can do.
- Improve the effectiveness of the 16 to 19 programmes of study by:
 - securing strong leadership across all aspects of the programme
 - continuing to broaden the curriculum on offer so that students have a greater choice in the subjects they can study
 - ensuring the highest quality teaching in all subjects
 - setting challenging targets that are relevant to the different courses studied and level of complexity of qualifications.
- Increasing the effectiveness of the governing body's role in holding leaders to account for the achievements and progress of pupils by:
 - ensuring that they receive regular information on the progress pupils are making across the school and across subjects.
- Develop the school's information and communications infrastructure to ensure that pupils thrive in this area of the curriculum and to provide timely and effective management of assessment and information systems across the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- There has been significant change in staff and leadership in the past 18 months. On his appointment in September 2015, the headteacher quickly ascertained an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Garnering the support of the new chair of governors, governors and most staff, he set strong plans in place to transform Nunnykirk and to tackle the areas identified as needing improvement at the last inspection. The appointment of two senior leaders in September 2016 strengthened leadership further. Together they are driving improvement well.
- Pupils' progress is hastening, particularly in English. Arrangements to manage the performance of staff have been tightened. Robust arrangements have been put in place to check the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. When weaknesses are found, the headteacher ensures that timely actions are taken by staff to improve matters. Staff report how they are being held to account more rigorously through sharper targets and reviews towards meeting them.
- Leaders and governors know there is still more to do to realise their ambitious vision. This is to make Nunnykirk a centre of excellence for pupils with dyslexia, a place where pupils achieve highly academically, as well as continuing the well-established strengths in the development of pupils' personal qualities.
- Pupils now benefit from a broad curriculum that is matched more carefully to their individual needs and interests. The new 'curriculum 2017' is enriched by a wide range of out-of-school activities within and beyond the school day. Together with the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum, assemblies and tutor time, it promotes pupils' emotional, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Consequently pupils flourish in their personal development. They also develop the qualities that lie at the heart of the values of modern Britain successfully. Pupils experience and enjoy a wide range of physical education (PE) lessons, in school and local sports centres. They thoroughly enjoy lessons and achieve well in the wide range of activities available. Although there are key stage 2 pupils the school does not receive additional funding for PE.
- Parents' comments in surveys and letters reveal the transformation of their children's happiness and willingness to attend school after often previous unsatisfactory experiences. A number of pupils have been out of school for a long period before arriving at Nunnykirk. Their attendance rates shoot up once they have settled at the school. Rates are broadly average and there is virtually no persistent absence.
- Too few pupils are entitled to the additional pupil premium to report on their achievements. However, all pupils now benefit from a bespoke curriculum that focuses on their specific special educational needs and/or disabilities and their personal interests. The additional funding for pupils' specific learning difficulty, dyslexia, is well spent. This is because staff are skilled in understanding and tackling pupils' barriers to reading, comprehension and spelling. 'Special English' lessons are tightly focused on

ensuring that pupils acquire the skills they need to overcome or manage their barriers and make good progress. Pupils read often and widely. They become confident and accomplished readers during their time at Nunnykirk.

- Leaders are taking the right actions to improve weaker areas but it is too early to show the full impact of all their endeavours. For example, although improving, the quality of teaching is variable. Recent systems to assess pupils' progress are not yet used fully by teachers to inform activities in all lessons and subjects. This means work set is sometimes not challenging enough, particularly for the most able pupils. Assessment systems and those for the strategic management of information are being held back by delays in the development of the school's information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. Plans are in place to tackle this.
- Until very recently, the sixth form curriculum has been too narrow. This has put off a few students staying on at Nunnykirk. For example, a few students gave up their studies last year because of the limited offer available. The headteacher has ensured, as a result of thorough consultation with students, staff and parents, that the curriculum is much broader. Students can now choose from an increasingly broad range of courses that lead to a wider range of national qualifications.
- Despite the previous narrowness of the curriculum, school-based and independent careers advice and guidance is strong. This begins when pupils start Nunnykirk and includes many work experience opportunities, an independent living curriculum and experiences like outdoor pursuits and community work. This work ensures that pupils are well prepared for the world beyond school. All pupils who left at the end of Year 11 or Year 13 in 2016 moved onto their chosen destinations successfully.
- The headteacher had developed strong partnerships with parents and prospective parents. Communications are diverse and very regular. They are a fundamental part of aiding pupils' smooth transition into school, gaining pupils' trust and engaging them successfully in their learning, often for the first time in many months or years.

Governance of the school

- Governors are supportive and visit regularly. They share leaders' passion to do the best for their pupils. Much-improved financial management arrangements have put the school back on a sustainable footing. Governors ensure that pupils are safeguarded. They receive regular reports about the work of the school including information on pupils' attendance and outcomes from key stage 4 and sixth form examinations. Governors also receive regular oral updates on how well individual pupils are achieving in this small school. They do not receive formal reports on the progress pupils are making across all year groups, nor any nationally comparable end-of-key-stage data. This limits their ability to challenge leaders fully on the impact of their work on pupils' learning and progress over time. They are taking action to rectify this.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Policies and procedures have been updated and are in line with current requirements. Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding and vigilant in recognising and responding to any concerns. The designated lead for safeguarding works closely with a range of agencies and the care staff to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and supported in times of need. Statutory checks made on staff, governors, external providers such as counsellors and therapists ensure their suitability to work with children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers do not have consistently high expectations. As a result pupils have not made the progress they should in some academic subjects. Teaching of English is improving rapidly. New leadership of the subject and higher expectations are leading to the faster rates of progress clearly evident in pupils' workbooks in key stage 2 and key stage 3.
- This strong work is not repeated in the workbooks for pupils' foundation subjects such as religious education and geography. This is because teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what their pupils can write and record. Sometimes work is not demanding enough and so progress stalls to a steady rather than a good rate. Books show that in mathematics pupils sometimes complete work that they have already mastered, and the work does not consolidate and deepen their understanding.
- Where pupils struggle with the written word, teachers focus on developing pupils' oral skills to establish what pupils understand or can do and then move them on from what they already know. Photography is being used more regularly in key stage 2 to capture pupils' achievements in practical activities. Staff are working to further develop this form of assessment to help identify progress over time more effectively.
- Typical of all lessons are the high-quality and mature relationships between pupils and their teachers. Pupils say they value the support of the adults in school and the very small class groups. They say they can have help when they need it and importantly can share their views, ask or answer questions in a trusting atmosphere. Teachers are adept at building pupils' confidence and self-esteem. This is an important step in helping pupils to take an active part in lessons following often very unhappy previous school experiences.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The development of pupils' personal, social and emotional development lies at the heart of its work. Pastoral support is second to none. Pupils often start Nunnykirk with very unhappy previous experiences and are vulnerable because of this and their specific special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils learn how to be healthy and safe and to become confident, self-aware and articulate members of this inclusive school community. Counsellors, occupational and

speech therapists provided by school add to the range of support. This ensures that pupils' needs are very well met and they are sensitively supported should they be having a difficult time.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very strongly. The school's commitment to equality of opportunity plays a key part in building pupils' self-esteem and belief in themselves and to understand, respect and value the differences in others. Pupils also gain a good understanding of world cultures and religions and the values and qualities that are key to taking a successful part in modern British society. Out-of-school activities including activities in the local and wider community and charity work enable pupils to mix with other young people, and people of all ages in communities beyond their small school.
- Pupils are acutely aware of derogatory or discriminatory language as many have experienced it first hand in previous school lives. They know that any such language would not be tolerated in the school and report that bullying just does not take place in Nunnykirk. Pupils have an empathy and sensitivity to the needs of others beyond their years. They are encouraged to grapple with real ethical and moral issues through discussion and debate. For example, they were seen to rise to the challenge in a debate about whether a young pupil from Afghanistan should be deported to their own country, with maturity and clarity.
- Pupils thrive in the open, caring and trusting atmosphere, where everyone's views are valued and respected. They are encouraged to articulate their thoughts and their views are constantly sought. Pupils develop the skills and confidence to be resilient young adults by the time they leave and are well prepared for their life beyond school. They are strong contributors to the school's development and improvement. The school council is very influential but everyone 'gets a say'.
- Regular communication with parents ensures that their views are sought about all aspects of the school's work. The school's regular surveys of parents' views and parental responses to Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire, show they are highly positive about the safety, education and care provided. They often note the transformational impact of the school to their children's wellbeing. One family's written comments echo that of many: 'We can't believe how much she has changed and really gained confidence in herself. For the first time in her life she has talked positively about school.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are articulate, friendly and supportive of one another. They quickly make friends and develop trusting and mature relationships with each other and adults. Behaviour is good as pupils move from class to class, at break and lunchtimes and in lessons. Occasionally, when learning is not matched precisely enough to pupils' current abilities, attention wanes slightly. While pupils remain polite, their attitudes to learning become passive rather than enthusiastic.
- Pupils' attendance leaps once they settle into Nunnykirk. Many have experienced significant disruption to their learning prior to attending this school. Attendance rates are broadly average and no pupils are persistently absent.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Observations of learning, review of pupils' workbooks, discussions with leaders and school assessment information indicates the progress of pupils currently in the school is improving, but is not consistently good. Pupils' progress in key stage 2 is stronger in English and mathematics than in the broader curriculum such as geography or religious education. This is because expectations are not consistently high enough in terms of the work that pupils should produce. Leaders know more needs to be done to ensure that more pupils make rapid progress from their starting points, particularly the most able pupils. They are taking action to tackle this.
- Recent improvements to the quality of teaching, particularly in English, have ensured a better focus on pupils' individual starting points and that more pupils are working at levels that are expected for their age. Pupils are prepared well for the harder qualifications they now study.
- Pupils enter the school with often well below average starting points. The number of pupils in each cohort is very low so it is difficult to make generalisations because achievements vary from year to year and are subject to subject. With that caveat in mind, overall outcomes by the end of key stage 4 have been below average over time. The number of GCSE qualifications studied by each pupil has also been below that found nationally until this year.
- In 2016, the small group of pupils who took GCSE examinations made broadly expected progress in mathematics but below average progress in English. Pupils who took photography GCSE achieved well. None gained the highest level but all at least gained the equivalent of a grade C. Outcomes were not as strong in art and design, hospitality and catering, and science. All pupils gained a GCSE qualification but not often at a grade C or above. Pupils' achievements have been generally stronger in the qualifications they take that do not count in the national school performance tables. These include functional skills qualifications in computing, communication and English.
- Teachers use the 'special English' lessons and daily guided reading sessions to tackle individual pupils' specific learning difficulties well. This work and careful one-to-one support helps pupils to develop their skills in reading, spelling and comprehension successfully. Progress is strong in these lessons. Pupils' progress in the broader curriculum is not consistently strong because not all teachers set activities that ensure that pupils can move on well from what they already know or understand.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The quality of leadership, teaching, curriculum and students' outcomes is variable and requires further improvement to be consistently good. Attainment is variable across subjects. Teachers do not monitor students' progress sharply enough to ensure that work is pitched to challenge them to achieve their best consistently across subjects studied.
- As with the main school, the proportion of pupils in the sixth form taking examinations is too small to make generalisations. Overall, students enter with below average prior skills and understanding and make variable progress in the small range of courses they

study. Last year students' achievements were well above average in photography but below in fine art.

- Recent rigorous assessment procedures are not fully embedded yet. Assessment procedures are in place. However, there is not enough detail in the evaluation of students' learning to help them to understand fully what they need to do next to ensure progress is strong and achievement high. For example, students' targets for AS and A level photography in their individual assessment sheets were sometimes similar, as were the tasks to complete. This is despite students being in different year groups and studying different qualifications.
- Pupils who do not achieve a mathematics qualification in key stage 4 are able to continue their studies. Progress is variable. Occasionally students complete work that is not demanding enough to enable them to gain a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts studied.
- The choice of subjects has been too narrow in the past. Leaders have taken action to ensure that students can now choose from an increasingly broad range of courses that lead to a wider range of national accreditations and qualifications. It is too soon to see the full impact of this work
- Students develop into articulate, well-rounded adults and are well prepared for their world of work, education or training during their time in Nunnykirk. This is because their personal skills are highly developed. Students are well prepared socially, emotionally and personally for their next steps. They access weekly personalised and appropriate work experiences that help them to develop the skills for their chosen destinations.
- Students act as strong role models for younger pupils and make an active contribution to the school, from their roles of responsibility such as prefects, or welcoming visitors and guests to the school. Courses such as independent living and the Duke of Edinburgh's award promote students' independence, communication and team building skills well. Significant work has been undertaken to improve the sixth form centre, to create a study atmosphere for students that is different to the lower school and to develop the attitudes to independent study they will need in the future.
- The widening curriculum, along with other aspects of the school's work in the sixth form is ensuring that the 16 to 19 programme is compliant with statutory requirements and supports students' smooth transitions into the world beyond school.

School details

Unique reference number	122390
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10024076

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	9 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	8
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Beton
Headteacher	Mr Barry Frost
Telephone number	01670 772685
Website	www.nunnykirk.co.uk
Email address	secretary@nunnykirk.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 February 2014

Information about this school

- There is no statutory requirement for non-maintained schools to publish information on a school website. The school makes all of its policies available to parents. This includes the school's up-to-date safeguarding policy. A website is currently under development.
- Nunnykirk is a much smaller than average-sized special school. It provides education for day and boarding pupils from the age of 9 to 18 years. A significant proportion arrive at the school part way through their education. The number of pupils who board at the school varies from week to week.
- The boarding provision is subject to its own inspection. At the time of this inspection

the most recent inspection report for boarding provision was March 2016. It can be found on Ofsted's inspection report website.

- All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities as result of their specific learning difficulties. These are primarily dyslexia. An increasing proportion enter school with additional learning needs. All but one of the pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- All pupils are of white British heritage. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to pupil premium funding is too low to take account of in this report. The proportion is much lower than that found nationally.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September 2015. A new chair of the governing body was appointed that term and a new senior leadership team was appointed in September 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in classrooms each day. Some lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher. Inspectors talked to pupils informally in lessons, in the dining hall and around the school. They spoke formally to a group of pupils on day one.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, school staff and the chair of the governing body. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the North East joint local authority commissioning group, which checks and commissions placements for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- On day one of the inspection a number of pupils were out on photography field trip and on day two all pupils with the exception of the sixth form were at a local sports centre for the first part of the morning. An inspector observed learning at the sports centre while the other inspector reviewed pupils' work books in a range of subjects with a member of the staff.
- Inspectors took account of the 14 parental responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Parent View, and outcomes from the school's regular surveys of parents' views. They also considered the views of the nine pupils and nine staff who completed their respective inspection questionnaires.
- A range of documents were reviewed including documents related to safeguarding procedures, pupils' progress information, headteacher's reports to governors, minutes of governing body meetings and the school's development planning.

Inspection team

Margaret Farrow, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Chris Campbell

Ofsted Inspector

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