

# St Aidan's Church of England Academy

Hundens Lane, Darlington, County Durham DL1 1LL

## Inspection dates

12–13 September 2017

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress varies between subjects and year groups and overall requires improvement. Standards by Year 11 are below average. Leaders have not overcome a legacy of weak outcomes rapidly enough, especially in English.
- Teaching has not adapted swiftly enough to meet the challenges of the new curriculum. New approaches to teaching and learning have been established but are not well embedded. As a result, despite some recent improvements, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains variable between subjects.
- Pupils' work is not consistently well matched to their varying needs and abilities and often lacks challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve well enough. Differences in their achievement compared with that of others are not diminishing rapidly enough.
- Leaders and governors have not acted swiftly enough to improve pupils' attendance. Too many pupils are absent from school regularly. As a result, pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare require improvement.
- The skills of middle leaders in monitoring pupils' progress and developing the quality of teaching are still developing.

### The school has the following strengths

- The principal and her team have a clear sense of moral purpose and a commitment to improving outcomes for pupils. High expectations, strong routines and effective performance management systems are leading to improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Stronger leadership and improving teaching are contributing to better progress for current pupils. This is particularly evident in science and mathematics and across key stage 3.
- Standards of behaviour have improved considerably. Strong routines are followed consistently by all staff to create an orderly, respectful and safe learning environment.
- Leaders have worked effectively with other schools and improvement partners to strengthen wider leadership and introduce stronger systems to improve progress across the school.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is consistently good in all subject areas, thus ensuring that all pupils make at least good progress, by:
  - embedding new approaches to teaching and learning across all subjects and key stages
  - developing pupils' learning behaviours in order to heighten their engagement in lessons and accelerate their progress
  - pitching work at a more demanding level that enables pupils to make strong progress, particularly the most able
  - diminishing differences in progress for disadvantaged pupils by matching teaching, additional interventions and resources more closely to their needs
  - eliminating variability between subjects so that improvements in mathematics and science are replicated across the curriculum.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
  - implementing curriculum changes and lesson routines effectively across all subjects
  - continuing to develop the skills of middle leaders in monitoring pupils' progress and developing the quality of teaching so that variance between subjects is reduced
  - working with improvement partners to accelerate the sharing of good practice and to build the capacity of leaders at all levels to secure further improvement.
- Rapidly improve attendance by:
  - building stronger links with hard-to-reach families
  - ensuring that leaders and governors regularly monitor attendance and measure the effectiveness of key strategies to improve attendance
  - effectively using pupil premium and special educational needs funding to improve the attendance of these key groups.

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

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- The principal and her leadership team have introduced a culture of high expectations and assembled a committed team of teachers who are beginning to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Their actions are beginning to show improvements in pupils' outcomes, although these improvements have been slower than necessary and a gap remains between published outcomes and emerging progress.
- The principal has taken decisive action to address weaker teaching, resulting in significant changes to staffing. Clear improvements are evident in subjects such as science and mathematics, although the rate of improvement has been slower in English. More rigorous systems are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and its impact on progress, although too much variance remains.
- Leaders have developed more accurate and purposeful assessment systems that monitor pupils' progress across the curriculum. Subject leaders use information from assessment to modify planning and support interventions. Standards are moderated through regular moderation with external partners.
- The principal and her team have led significant improvements in behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Pupils comment upon a substantial improvement in behaviour. Leaders have heightened the involvement of all staff in new behaviour routines, such as the new line-up arrangements for lessons. This has brought calmness to the school environment and removed what were previously significant barriers to learning.
- Leaders have developed more positive relationships with parents. A record 88% of Year 11 parents attended the most recent parents' evening. Over two thirds of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would now recommend the school to others, whereas in 2016 only a third would do so. However, a number still have concerns over aspects of progress and behaviour.
- The principal has recruited a team of teachers who are committed to her ethos of high expectations and to achieving the very best outcomes for pupils at the school. On occasions, this has resulted in delays to appointments although staffing is now stronger than in recent years.
- While leaders have secured significant improvements in behaviour, their actions to improve attendance have been less successful. Emerging signs of improvement are evident, but leaders and governors have not implemented new strategies swiftly enough.
- The principal and the vice-principal have introduced much more meaningful performance management procedures that have contributed to improvements in teaching. Purposeful support is in place for teachers whose practice does not meet leaders' heightened expectations.
- Assistant principals and middle leaders are taking a much more active role in

developing the curriculum, monitoring progress and checking standards of teaching. This is leading to much stronger progress for pupils in mathematics and science. These developments have not been securely embedded across all subjects, and leadership capacity remains vulnerable in those subjects where expertise resides in a single subject specialist.

- While leaders are providing pupils with more purposeful guidance to follow a broad and balanced curriculum, in the past too few have followed academic subjects such as humanities at key stage 4. Pupils do develop their spiritual and moral awareness in assemblies, tutor period and in religious education lessons where they discuss issues of faith and morality. New behavioural routines are developing pupils' social awareness of the needs of others, although their cultural opportunities are less developed.
- The vice-principal is targeting funding to support disadvantaged pupils in a more focused manner. As a result, support is more effectively targeted and there are signs that current pupils are making improving progress. However, differences in progress and attainment have not diminished rapidly enough.
- The new special educational needs coordinator is developing much more robust systems to diagnose pupils' needs and monitor the impact of support. She has met all pupils to diagnose their support needs and discuss their perceptions of the support they receive. This has led to more effective systems to monitor the progress of pupils and the impact of the support they receive, which is improving rates of progress for these pupils.
- The school has used external support to improve behaviour, strengthen leadership and build subject expertise. This has contributed to improving progress in some subjects and much better behaviour, although the impact of this support has varied across subjects.

## **Governance of the school**

- The governing body shares the principal's sense of moral purpose and has provided support and challenge over a turbulent period of change. Governors have assisted the principal in the process of addressing inadequate teaching and the associated staffing changes that have been made in recent years.
- Governors are regular visitors to the school. They have developed appropriate committee structures and minutes of meetings show that they are more active in holding leaders to account. The chair of the governing body interviews vice-principals separately to gauge the impact of their actions to secure improvement. Governors have built capacity by attracting governor ambassadors from outstanding schools to strengthen accountability and expertise.
- Governors are aware of financial pressures the school faces and work closely with leaders to explore a sustainable future. Governors meet key leaders to review the impact of pupil premium funding. While differences are beginning to diminish, they have not done so rapidly enough.
- Governors take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and work with key staff to check that vetting procedures, training and wider safeguarding procedures are up to date.

- Governors are aware that attendance has not improved rapidly enough and are now working more closely with key leaders to monitor the impact of the revised attendance strategies. While some improvements are beginning to appear, they have not acted promptly enough in holding leaders to account in this crucial area.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that training for all staff and governors is thorough and up to date. Leaders carry out appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of adults working on site, and governors check the effectiveness of this work.
- The school inclusion officer thoroughly pursues any concerns over pupils' welfare and records the results in assiduous detail. Close links are maintained with external agencies to support children and families, and over 75 home visits were made last year.
- Pupils feel safe in school and comment upon significant improvements in behaviour over the past two years. They believe that bullying is increasingly rare and have confidence that staff will support them in addressing concerns that they have. Pupils in Year 9 described how behaviour was now 'amazing' in comparison with past standards.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is variable and does not enable pupils to consistently make good rates of progress. New lesson routines are bringing greater consistency and strengthening planning. However, on too many occasions, teachers do not move pupils on to more demanding challenges swiftly enough.
- The quality of teaching varies between subjects. Where teaching is strongest, teachers use their subject expertise and lesson management to engage pupils and secure improving progress. This is particularly apparent in mathematics and science. Although improving, these qualities are not as consistently evident in English.
- Teachers follow consistent patterns for learning across the school. This has led to stability for pupils and added clarity to their learning routines. Common strategies for setting objectives and reviewing what has been learned across the school are developing pupils' learning skills. However, teachers do not implement these new approaches effectively across all subjects.
- Leaders have introduced new systems to improve the impact of feedback upon pupils' progress. There is evidence in assessment books that pupils are routinely acting upon feedback and that this is supporting improvements in progress for current pupils. Pupils are committed to improving their work and developing their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- New 'recall' tasks are helping pupils to build up their knowledge of key subject content through daily homework tasks that are followed up in tutor sessions the following morning.
- Teaching does not routinely challenge the most able pupils. New lesson routines are introducing elements of challenge, but on too many occasions the tasks that teachers

set do not enable the most able to make good progress.

- Pupils demonstrate extremely positive attitudes when given clear tasks or when teaching excites and engages them. This was evident when pupils were exploring the Earth's crust in geography or exploring first-person responses to the attacks in New York on 11 September 2001.
- Teaching support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. As a result, these pupils are making much better rates of progress across the school.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. Much work is being done to develop pupils' learning skills through clear lesson routines and recall tasks that encourage pupils to remember key lesson content. This is beginning to contribute to improving progress, but many pupils still lack confidence and do not engage fully in lessons.
- Pupils feel safer in school as a result of clear routines and the high visibility of all staff. The majority of parents agree. Pupils in all year groups say that bullying is rare and that they have confidence in the ability of staff to address this.
- Although behavioural processes and lesson routines are now much more formal, relationships between pupils and staff remain respectful and positive. Staff routinely greet pupils by name on arrival at lessons.
- Through activities such as their roles as sports leaders or visits to local care homes, pupils develop a sense of social responsibility. All pupils follow religious studies. Pupils explore issues of morality and the harmful effects of racism.
- Pupils say that new guidance on course options and careers has supported them in choosing appropriate courses that helped them to progress to further study or employment.
- Pupils accessing alternative provision at Rise Carr College receive an appropriate curriculum and their progress and welfare are checked at regular intervals.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Overall, attendance is below average and has been too low for too long. The attendance of key groups such as disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities requires improvement. Despite intensive commitment, including 75 home visits last year, leaders' actions and strategies to overcome barriers to attendance have not been rapid enough or had sufficient impact. There are some signs that new strategies are beginning to improve attendance for

pupils who are regularly absent.

- Many pupils commented on significant improvements in behaviour. Clear and positive routines set a purposeful and calm tone around the site and in lessons. The past year has seen reductions in the rate of fixed-term exclusions, as well as better engagement and inclusion. Even so, overall rates of exclusion remain above average.
- In lessons, pupils generally behave well, particularly when teaching actively engages them in learning and in pursuing topics in greater depth. However, pupils are less focused when learning fails to engage them or allows them to coast by on the contributions of others.
- Pupils take a clear pride in their appearance and in the quality of work in their assessment books. The school site is maintained to a high standard, showing that pupils take a pride in their learning environment.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- While leaders have secured some improvements in outcomes, the rate of improvement has not been rapid enough. Outcomes for pupils in 2017 did show an improvement on the previous two years, but inconsistencies remain. The marked improvements in the progress and attainment of pupils in mathematics and science have not been matched in English, where gains have been marginal.
- Improvements in teaching and leadership are contributing to improving outcomes in mathematics and science. Teachers are using their subject expertise and knowledge of the curriculum to set work that is enabling pupils to make stronger progress. Their increasing progress at key stage 4 is also evident at key stage 3.
- The pace of improvement has been less rapid in English at key stage 4. Outcomes in 2017 indicated only a marginal improvement on the previous year as teachers had not acclimatised themselves fully to the heightened demands of the new curriculum. However, a detailed review of books shows that pupils are now making better progress in Year 10 and at key stage 3.
- The most recent outcomes at the end of key stage 4 across the wider curriculum show a mixed picture of improvement. Improvements in art and design, health and social care, and physical education and sport have been offset by much weaker outcomes in the humanities. While assessment books show that current pupils are making better progress in geography, the picture remains variable.
- A thorough review of pupils' assessment books confirms that current pupils are making better rates of progress. Work across the core subjects, geography and French revealed improving progress. Significant changes to staffing and teaching initiated by leaders are beginning to raise standards, particularly at key stage 3. However, pupils have suffered from a legacy of weaker teaching and leadership, particularly at key stage 4.

- In Years 8 to 11, there is evidence that disadvantaged pupils are making better progress and that differences between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are beginning to diminish. In pupils' assessment books across a number of subjects, there is evidence that disadvantaged pupils are making improving rates of progress in line with their peers. New initiatives are leading to more focused support, but their weaker progress has not been tackled rapidly enough.
- The most able pupils have not been stretched in the past and this has led to a legacy of weaker progress. There is some evidence that these pupils are making better progress at key stage 3, but the picture remains variable in lessons and in books, as these pupils are not routinely challenged.
- As a result of improving provision and stronger monitoring, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making improving rates of progress.



## School details

Unique reference number	135314
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10036567

This inspection of the school 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 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	447
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Davison
Principal	Nicole Gibbon
Telephone number	01325 373770
Website	<a href="http://staidansacademy.co.uk">http://staidansacademy.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:enquiries@staidansacademy.org.uk">enquiries@staidansacademy.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	10–11 February 2016

## Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about governors' terms of office on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the terms of office for governors on its website.
- St Aidan's Church of England Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The number of pupils on roll has declined since the previous inspection.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of staffing changes, including the appointment of new senior and middle leaders.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is well above average.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' performance at GCSE.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 4 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.
- A very small number of pupils in Year 11 are educated at Rise Carr College, where they pursue a range of academic, vocational and social qualifications.
- The academy sponsors are the Church of England and David and Anne Crossland.
- The school receives support from a range of consultants brokered principally through the Diocese of Durham.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a wide range of lessons across a wide range of subjects and year groups. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors on a number of observations.
- Meetings were held with the principal, senior leaders, middle leaders and a wide range of staff. Inspectors also met groups of pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 and talked to pupils at breaktimes and in lessons.
- The lead inspector met the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. He also met the director of education for the Diocese of Durham and the school improvement partner.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons and at break- and lunchtime.
- Inspectors extensively examined the quality of work in a wide range of books. They discussed pupils' work and their learning with them in lessons.
- Inspectors looked at the school's work and considered documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, curriculum and assessment plans, and information relating to pupils' achievement and safeguarding.
- The inspector took into account 15 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 17 free-text responses.

## Inspection team

Malcolm Kirtley, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Karen Gammack

Ofsted Inspector

Dimitris Spiliotis

Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. [www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings](http://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings).

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