

Biddick Academy

Biddick Lane, Washington, Tyne and Wear NE38 8AL

Inspection dates

16–17 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
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

- The quality of teaching is highly variable within and between subjects. Too often, the needs of different groups of pupils are not well met, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and the most able. They do not make the progress they should.
- Leaders have not acted quickly enough to prevent pupils' progress declining over time in both English and mathematics at the end of key stage 4. Too many pupils continue to underachieve.
- Some leaders do not carefully monitor and evaluate the impact of their actions. As a result, they do not know what is working or what to do next. This is slowing the much needed improvements in pupils' progress.
- Senior leaders have an overgenerous view of the strengths of the school. Plans for improvement are not focused sharply enough on key priorities.
- Disadvantaged pupils have underperformed significantly over time. The school is now taking more effective action to support their needs, although this work is at an early stage.
- Pupils do not always know how to improve their work because teachers do not follow the school's policy on feedback consistently.
- Leaders have insufficient expectations for pupils to present their work neatly and use correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Outcomes require improvement because pupils do not make consistently strong progress across all subjects in all year groups.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are welcoming, polite and courteous. They want to learn and arrive at lessons ready to learn. A strong ethos of mutual respect is evident between staff and pupils throughout the school.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school and, as a result, pupils say they feel safe. They say bullying is rare and is dealt with swiftly if it occurs.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It offers a wide range of learning opportunities, both academic and vocational.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly strong and prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Staff provide high-quality, individualised pastoral care and support for pupils, especially for those who are vulnerable.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of strategic leadership across the school by ensuring that:
 - senior leaders improve self-evaluation procedures and develop an accurate process for honest evaluation of the effectiveness of the school
 - senior leaders use thorough quality assurance procedures to monitor all areas of the school’s work, in order to secure sustained improvement in the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and outcomes
 - governors have an accurate understanding of the school’s performance so that they can challenge leaders to take urgent and effective action to remedy weaknesses
 - all leaders embed a culture of high aspirations and expectations of staff and pupils
 - all leaders maintain a rigorous focus on progress and act quickly and decisively to support pupils when difficulties arise.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - all pupils make at least good progress from their starting points across the school, especially in English and mathematics
 - all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, boys, girls, low-ability pupils and the most able pupils, reach the standards of which they are capable
 - the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is rigorously monitored against their targets, so that actions can be taken in good time to support their learning needs.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have consistently high and appropriate expectations of all their pupils
 - use assessment information well to plan learning activities which meet the needs of pupils from their different starting points and lead to good progress
 - use probing questioning to challenge and deepen pupils’ thinking and check their understanding, so that their learning is secure
 - apply consistently the school’s policy to provide pupils with advice and guidance that helps them improve their work
 - have high expectations of neatness and the presentation of pupils’ work.

An external review of governance 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 headteacher has great compassion for those in need. He has created a strong culture of mutual respect between staff and pupils. Since the last inspection, he has made a number of astute appointments to leadership positions which have helped to improve leadership capacity.
- Leaders' actions have been too slow to prevent a decline in the progress of almost all groups of pupils in English and mathematics over time. Convincing plans to bring about substantial and sustained improvements are not yet in place. Inspection evidence confirms that current progress in English, mathematics and also science is not good enough.
- Leaders' evaluations of the school's performance are overgenerous. They have not accurately, or clearly, identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. As a result, plans for improvement are neither sharp nor convincing.
- Some leaders focus on activity, fail to evaluate the impact of their actions and do not use information appropriately. For example, the English department have introduced single-sex teaching, but do not know if this is having a positive effect and improving outcomes. Attendance and exclusions data are not managed with sufficient scrutiny to identify emerging trends and take actions to bring about sustained improvement.
- Additional funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is used effectively to support pupils who attend the resourced provision within the school. Pupils, parents and carers value the very safe and nurturing environment of the Unity Centre. Pupils enjoy attending most of their lessons in the main school with their peers. The strategic leadership of the provision, however, is not sharp enough. Leaders do not know what progress pupils who have an education, health and care plan are making towards their bespoke targets. As a result, they are unable to act quickly to support them if their learning falters.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is improving this year. There is evidence of a more consistent and thorough approach to the monitoring of the quality of teaching and its impact on learning. Teachers value the improving help and support available to them and enjoy a wide range of training opportunities. They regularly share ideas and good practice.
- A small, new and dynamic team has grasped the challenge of raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Team members have taken advice and are now systematically tackling the difficulties that some pupils face. By intervening quickly to accelerate pupils' learning and by enabling them to study and complete homework, they are beginning to see real change and early evidence of improved progress. The additional funding available to the school for this work is now having a greater impact than in the past.
- The Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium is used well to support low-ability pupils to make substantial gains in their reading ages and to improve their mathematical skills.
- Since the last inspection, a growing number of middle leaders have a clear strategic

view of their own subject departments and priorities for improvement. They are keen to improve outcomes. They are improving their curriculum areas so that they capture pupils' interest and develop their knowledge and understanding. This is very much the case in geography, history, theology and philosophy, and modern foreign languages.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and offers a wide range of learning, both academic and vocational. A strong focus is given to developing pupils' personal development through a wide range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities. Pupils have many opportunities for high-quality and meaningful spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. British values in action underpin the life of the school.

Governance of the school

- Governors are passionate about the school and ambitious for their pupils. They want them to have the very best of life chances when they leave school.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties with care and vigilance.
- Governors have an accurate view of some of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. However, they have not been well informed regarding a number of performance difficulties, including the seriousness of the decline in progress in both English and mathematics. They are aware that they need to have a greater understanding of the current accountability system so that they can better support leaders, provide effective challenge and hold them to account for pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Policies and procedures are fit for purpose. For example, current checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils are robust. The school's child protection policy is clear and helpful. All staff, including governors, receive regular training in safeguarding and child protection. Staff are vigilant and know what to do if they have reason to believe that a pupil is at risk of harm.
- Leaders work effectively with parents and work as closely as possible with external agencies in order to safeguard pupils. Leaders are frustrated at times when they encounter slow responses to their concerns. They constantly have to chase others for necessary actions.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from a range of dangers, including those associated with the use of social media and online bullying.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because there is too much variability in quality, both within the same subject and between different subjects. This is particularly, but not exclusively, the case in English, mathematics and science.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers plan lessons to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding effectively. They adapt their plans sensitively for those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Additional adults are deployed effectively with a clear purpose and

support pupils well. All groups of pupils are engaged, interested and make strong progress.

- In these effective lessons, teachers challenge the most able with incisive questioning and ensure that low-ability pupils are able to access learning successfully. Any specific needs of disadvantaged learners are planned for. Pupils value the feedback from their teachers to help them improve their work.
- Too often, however, and especially in English, mathematics and science, the absolute reverse is the case. The level of challenge is low. Time is not used productively and learning is severely restricted. The learning needs of all groups of pupils are not well met. Additional staff are ineffective in their support of pupils. Specific guidance to help pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities learn is not used. There is little or no helpful feedback from teachers and so pupils have scant knowledge of what they need to do to improve.
- Questioning is used well in some lessons to probe pupils' understanding, identify misconceptions and then reshape explanations. In other lessons, however, pupils' understanding is simply assumed, and work is completely unchecked. Consequently, neither the pupils nor their teachers know if sufficient progress has been made. Some pupils, while they do not disrupt such lessons, quietly disengage completely from their learning.
- There is substantial variation in the pride that pupils take in the quality of their work. There is no whole-school focus regarding the quality of pupils' writing, their spelling or the presentation of their work. Teachers do not check or challenge these. It is up to pupils. Although some boys and girls do take pride in the quality of their written work, there is notable a difference between boys and girls. Too many boys are not proactively supported to write clearly and record their work carefully and thoroughly. There is no recognition by leaders that this will weaken pupils' ability to reach the grades of which they are capable in external examinations.
- There is variability in staff expectations regarding what pupils might achieve. Some have very low expectations and the quality of their teaching does not enable pupils to reach high enough standards.
- Assessment information is used well by a small number of staff to inform the effective planning of their lessons and to identify those who are falling behind. The information is available to all staff, but its widespread use is not yet the norm.
- Work in pupils' books reflects the variability seen in lessons. In some, especially in theology and philosophy, geography, history and modern foreign languages, pupils are making increasingly strong progress. In too many English, mathematics and science books, learning is superficial and insecure.
- Pupils read confidently and assuredly because they are encouraged and supported to read widely and often. The library is well used by pupils at lunchtime and this contributes to their skills and interest in reading.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- A strong culture of mutual respect pervades the school. Pupils are considerate of each other and are polite and well-mannered. They are keen to learn and contribute confidently to lessons, knowing others listen carefully to what they have to say.
- Pupils say there is always someone to talk to if they have concerns. Strong pastoral care ensures that pupils are well supported, particularly those who are vulnerable due to a whole range of circumstances.
- Pupils who attend the Unity Centre grow in confidence due to the highly effective pastoral and personalised support they receive. Parents are full of praise for the staff in the centre and they speak powerfully about their good work and the positive culture staff have created. These are just a few of the highly complimentary comments parents have made: 'My child is made to feel safe, valued and respected'; 'My child is the happiest they have ever been in academic life'; 'My child has already achieved more than we thought possible and I can't wait to see what the future holds'; 'Home to school communications are second to none.'
- The good impact of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development can be seen in the strong, constructive and caring relationships that pervade the school. Pupils report that staff encourage them to be independent and take on responsibilities. They enjoy the wide range of opportunities that they have to learn about the values that lie at the heart of British society today. These include pupils' participation in national and international events promoting respect, peace and understanding.
- Leaders prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education. They have established strong links with local employers, who provide valued support for their careers programme. Effective and informative careers education, information, advice and guidance are valued by pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Movement around the school is both calm and orderly. Pupils are courteous to each other, are punctual to lessons and settle to their work quickly.
- Behaviour in lessons is usually good. Pupils work hard and want to make progress. In a few lessons, where teaching is weaker, some pupils do drift 'off task' but most pupils get on with their work and continue to try their best.
- Most pupils feel safe in school. Those who spoke with inspectors were adamant that bullying in all its forms, including homophobic or racist bullying, is rare. They are confident in staff to deal with matters effectively, should they raise a concern.
- Pupils have a good knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy and safe from a range of risks, including the misuse of alcohol and drugs.
- Pupils take pride in their uniform, which they wear smartly. They are proud of their school and keep it tidy and free from litter.

- Attendance is broadly average and most pupils value their education and attend regularly. A minority of pupils do not attend well and the school knows there is still more to do in order to ensure that all leaders, parents, pupils and staff understand their role in securing good attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The outcomes for pupils require improvement because they do not make good enough progress over time in too many subjects, including English and mathematics. As a result, pupils do not reach the standards of which they are capable in school and in external examinations at the end of Year 11.
- Leaders have not acted quickly enough to prevent the serious decline in English and mathematics since the last inspection. The progress made by pupils in lessons is simply not good enough and in external examinations it is below average.
- Achievement in science GCSEs has improved since the last inspection and progress was average in 2017; however, progress in lessons is highly variable. Pupils expressed real concern to inspectors regarding the impact of this on their future results.
- Substantial differences have stubbornly remained between disadvantaged pupils and others since the last inspection. However, these differences are now beginning to show evidence of diminishing as a result of the increasingly effective actions being taken by leaders.
- The school's tracking system indicates that the academic progress made by pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is variable both across year groups and across subjects. Inspection evidence saw inconsistent progress within different classroom settings.
- The progress made by different ability groups, including the most able pupils and low-ability pupils, is also highly variable from one subject to another. There is a growing gap between the achievements of boys and girls at the end of key stage 4. The school's internal data does not reveal a gap, although the work in pupils' books does.
- Pupils have aspirational targets for the end of key stage 4 and leaders are developing their assessment system so that they can monitor standards. This work is at an early stage of development. Nevertheless, it is beginning to help leaders and teachers to identify where pupils are falling behind, so that they can take actions to help them catch up. Inspection evidence confirms growing strengths in theology and philosophy, geography, history and modern foreign languages and the school has maintained previous strengths in art and design.

School details

Unique reference number	139839
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10048303

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,083
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	David McDonald
Headteacher	Paul Cowen
Telephone number	01915 111600
Website	www.biddickacademy.com/
Email address	admin@biddickacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	10–11 May 2016

Information about this school

- Biddick Academy is a stand-alone multi-academy trust. Governance arrangements for the trust include both members and directors who operate as the local governing body. Management responsibilities reside with the headteacher and his senior leadership team.
- Biddick Academy is a larger than average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils are White British and almost all speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is average.
- The academy has twice the average proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. This is because it is home to the 'Unity Centre', which is a specialist provision for 34 pupils who have a special educational need related to autism spectrum disorder.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who are supported by the school but do not have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The academy does not use alternative provision.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of key stage 4.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and teaching staff.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and age groups and scrutinised samples of pupils' written work. Many of these observations and activities were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the academy's review of its own performance and development plans, analyses of pupils' progress and minutes of governors' meetings. They considered a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, attendance and behaviour.
- Meetings were held with several different pupil groups from key stages 3 and 4. Inspectors also spoke with pupils informally in lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors analysed the 227 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) and 78 written comments. They also considered the 90 staff and the 124 pupil responses to their questionnaires.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement, analyses of pupils' performance, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding files and pupils' work.

Inspection team

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Geoffrey Lumsdon	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Roe	Ofsted 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.

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