

Inspection of Atkinson House School

North Terrace, Seghill, Cramlington, Northumberland NE23 7EB

Inspection dates: 30–31 January 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders are ambitious for the pupils. They aim for each pupil to be 'respectful, resilient, reflective and responsible'. Pupils' attitudes to learning improve over their time in school because their needs are well met. Although they attend this school more often than they attended their previous schools, some do not attend often enough.

Pupils are sensitive to each other's needs. They respect each other's differences. As one said, 'Why would we laugh at each other? We all have issues. That's why we are here.' Pupils could not recall any incidents of bullying at the school.

The school prepares pupils well for adulthood. They are taught to travel on buses and trains independently, cook delicious dishes, maintain motor vehicles and lay bricks. All pupils who left the school at the end of Years 11 and 13 in 2019 remain in education, employment or training.

The headteacher has very high expectations of pupils, both academically and socially. Leaders have revolutionised the science curriculum. Most curriculum areas are developing equally well. However, the curriculum for English, and especially for reading, is not as strong.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The headteacher evaluated the school's strengths and areas of weakness incisively when he took up his post 12 months ago. Since that time, he has strengthened the school's leadership team and teaching workforce. The recruitment of a teaching and learning manager in September 2019 is bearing fruit. The quality of education in subjects such as mathematics and science is much improved.

Leaders have an ambitious new science curriculum. They ensure that any gaps in pupils' knowledge, caused by poor attendance at previous schools, are identified and plugged. Pupils benefit from the deep subject knowledge of teachers in the science department. Teachers' and pupils' enthusiasm for the subject shines through. Key stage 3 pupils use science-related vocabulary, such as chromosomes and mitochondria, in their oral answers and written work as a matter of course. Leaders are developing the curriculum for mathematics well too. Pupils enjoy mathematics. Their teachers ensure that they can add, subtract, multiply and divide well. This enables pupils in this special school to access the appropriate and challenging curriculum.

Leaders understand that the provision for English requires development. Currently, the scheme of work for English does not outline fully the knowledge, skills and vocabulary that pupils should be taught. Leaders, quite correctly, have implemented a rapid recovery programme. As a result, teachers are beginning to guide the

reading of small groups of pupils well. Older pupils enjoy reading modern classics such as Michelle Magorian's 'Goodnight Mr Tom'.

Many pupils are admitted to the school having been out of education for a considerable period of time. They have missed vital learning. Some, when they first start at Atkinson House, are reading at the standard of a Reception Year child. Teachers and learning support assistants ensure that these pupils get extra reading lessons. However, there is no agreed phonics programme in the school. Pupils do not have access to enough books that match their phonics abilities well. Many of the books that are read by lower-ability readers are in poor condition.

The new coordinator for special educational needs (SENCo) has identified many strengths in the school's provision. For example, the curriculum is adapted to meet pupils' needs well in subjects such as mathematics. The SENCo has revised the systems and procedures for SEND. All staff who work with an individual pupil now contribute to that pupil's termly and annual reviews.

Pupils, some who were non-attenders at their previous schools, attend school more regularly at Atkinson House. However, leaders recognise that there is more to do to ensure that all pupils attend well.

Pupils are taught how to manage their own behaviour. They are encouraged to overcome difficulties that arise. During the inspection, pairs of pupils chose a site on a beach, dug a shallow fire pit, built a fire from kindling and sticks and then used flint and steel to light it. They were persistent and resilient. All achieved success.

Pupils' behaviour improves over their time in school. Far fewer pupils were excluded in the autumn term 2019 than were excluded in the autumn term 2018. Similarly, the number of restraints is reducing. The headteacher and staff treat pupils with respect. Pupils respond positively in return.

The school provides exceptional pastoral support for the pupils and their families. Preparation for adult life is a strong aspect of the school's work. Pupils are accompanied to open days at further education colleges. They plan their own journeys and calculate the travel costs. Pupils include their achievements, such as The Duke of Edinburgh's bronze award, on the curricula vitae and job applications that they write. Pupils enjoy learning life skills such as cookery. Delicious smells wafted through the school during the inspection. Pupils were very proud of the delicious gingerbread loaves and pizzas they had made in food technology.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school's recruitment procedures and records are fully compliant with the government's requirements. Leaders ensure that all staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe. All staff attend annual child protection training.

Child protection issues are discussed by the whole-staff team at the end of each school day. Staff make referrals, such as those related to child criminal exploitation, appropriately and in a timely manner. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has implemented effective systems to ensure that pupils are safe when attending off-site alternative provision. Governors' oversight of safeguarding is strong.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The scheme of work for English does not precisely define the knowledge, skills and vocabulary that should be taught, and when. As a result, some pupils learn the same curricular content over and over again. This limits their progress and they become bored and disengaged. Leaders should ensure that the English curriculum is well sequenced and ambitious, and meets pupils' needs.
- There is no phonics scheme of work in this secondary special school. There are no phonetically decodable early reading books. Consequently, pupils who have very low reading ages when they are admitted to the school do not learn to read quickly enough. Leaders should ensure that staff are trained to deliver an agreed phonics scheme of work and that they have the appropriate resources to do so.
- Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough. They miss essential parts of the curriculum. Their learning suffers. Leaders should continue with their efforts to improve pupils' attendance further.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	132771
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10110615
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	Six
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Harrison
Headteacher	Paul Sampson
Website	www.atkinsonhouse.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 December 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up post in February 2019.
- The school uses three alternative providers: Engage, Total Tuition and Key Skills.
- Pupils who attend the school have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some have severe or moderate learning difficulties. All have an education, health and care plan.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team and three governors, including the chair of the governing body.

- We talked with the school’s improvement partner and a representative from the local authority by telephone.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, and personal, social, health, economic education and citizenship (PSHEE and C). We visited lessons, looked at pupils’ work, and spoke with pupils, teachers, subject and senior leaders to consider the quality of education.
- We checked the school’s record of recruitment checks and held a discussion with the DSL. The DSL provided comparative information about attendance, exclusions, behaviour incidents and physical restraints. We talked to staff about their safeguarding and child protection training. In addition, we talked to pupils about online safety, child criminal exploitation, behaviour, bullying and attendance.

Inspection team

Belita Scott, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Linda Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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