

Inspection of Excelsior Academy

Denton Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE15 6AF

Inspection dates: 10–11 March 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Excelsior Academy is a unique and complex school. It caters for primary and secondary-aged pupils from a deprived multi-cultural community. Around half of pupils speak English as an additional language. Pupils speak over 40 different languages. Many pupils join or leave the school during the school year.

Pupils do not do well enough in their studies. Early years education is not providing a good enough start. Standards of reading are too low at the end of the primary phase. In the secondary phase, pupils have made poor progress in recent years. Not enough pupils gain the qualifications they need to get on in life. However, leaders are addressing these problems. Teaching is improving, and the curriculum is becoming more ambitious.

Different cultures integrate happily. The staff work hard to build up positive and trusting relationships. The vast majority of pupils behave well and conduct themselves sensibly. Inevitably, a few pupils find it difficult to integrate and abide by the rules. Leaders do all they can to keep these pupils in education. The school does much to support pupils' personal and social development. Sometimes, pupils fall out with one another. However, there is little bullying. The pastoral staff act quickly if this happens and sort it out.

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

Senior leaders did not act quickly enough after the last inspection. Concerns grew when standards remained low in the primary phase and fell further in the secondary phase in 2018. Since then, the trust and the interim principal have got to the bottom of what was wrong. Although standards did not improve in 2019, they have halted the decline.

Leaders are in the process of transforming the curriculum they offer. In the primary school, the curriculum is broad and balanced. Leaders are ready to introduce a more suitable secondary school curriculum from September. Leaders are raising expectations. They want more pupils to study a more challenging programme. Currently, few pupils are studying GCSE subjects that make up the English baccalaureate. Next year, leaders want 60% of pupils to do so. In preparation for this, they have focused on improving the quality of teaching. A new approach to planning lessons has been introduced. Some teachers have found this a challenge. However, in many lessons, pupils are learning more. Teachers have quickly adopted this new approach across the full age range. Although this has raised the bar, the quality of teaching is still variable. Some departments, such as English and mathematics, are further on than others.

In the past, leaders did not do enough to put reading at the heart of the school's work. The teaching of early reading is still not good enough. The school has a programme to teach children phonics. However, teachers do not teach phonics

skilfully enough. Some phonics sessions are delivered in noisy and distracting rooms. Children find it difficult to concentrate. Weaker readers do not get enough help to catch up. Teachers provide books that children can read. However, weaker readers in Year 1 are slow to develop as fluent readers. By the end of the primary phase, standards in reading are too low. Currently, around 60% of pupils in key stage 3 cannot read well enough. This makes it difficult for them to learn. Senior leaders now recognise the importance of reading. They are providing much better help for pupils in the secondary phase to help them catch up. However, their plans to improve literacy are not as clear in the primary phase.

Last year, standards slipped in the early years. A new leader has been appointed recently. However, some staff absence is making it difficult for her to coordinate the team. Some adults do not do enough to encourage or question children when they are choosing from the activities available. The early years does have good curriculum planning in place. However, developments in the curriculum have not been fully implemented, as the new leader does not have the time or resources to do this. The early years team works closely with parents and carers. The team makes sure that children with particular needs are fully included in learning activities.

The sixth form is providing a good quality of education. There are courses for all pupils who wish to stay in education. This includes A levels, vocational courses and courses at lower levels. Many students in the sixth form did not attain a good GCSE pass in English or mathematics. A good proportion of those who re-sit the examination improve their grade. The sixth form is being well led and managed. Teaching is improving. Students attend well. There are well-planned opportunities to build students' character. They receive good careers information and help with applications to higher education. Most students undertake a work-related placement as part of their study programme.

Senior leaders and the trust provide ethical leadership. They are determined to meet the many challenges that young people in the community face. Managing behaviour at the Excelsior Academy can be a challenge. Some teachers would like senior leaders to help them more. Leaders are developing their own alternative provision for the most challenging pupils. Most pupils behave well. Lessons flow smoothly. Leaders only exclude pupils as a last resort. Pupils' attendance was close to the national average in recent years. However, this year more pupils have returned to their home country for prolonged periods. The level of attendance has fallen. Many pupils in Years 10 and 11 have missed school often. This risks their chances of attaining good GCSE qualifications.

The school does much to support pupils' personal development. Personal, social, health and religious education lessons cover topics about British values, diversity, safety and identity. Pupils know a lot about each other's culture and faith. There is an LGBT group. Pupils are tolerant and supportive of one another. They are proud of the cultural diversity within the school. Pupils are taught workplace skills and have excellent careers advice. There is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities that cater for pupils' diverse interests.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make all the necessary vetting checks on adults who work in or visit the school. Safeguarding leaders face considerable challenges. There are many pupils who are vulnerable and in need of help and protection. The school has lots of pastoral staff who provide this support. They are well organised. There are good systems in place to make sure pupils get the help they need. The team works hard to get to know the community. Leaders keep good records of the actions they take to protect pupils. They work extensively with different external agencies to protect pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In each phase of the school, many pupils are held back because they cannot read well enough. Weaknesses in the teaching of reading mean pupils fall behind in the primary school. In the secondary phase, pupils with weaker reading skills find it increasingly difficult to learn new, more complex knowledge. Under-developed reading is the single biggest barrier to pupils' achievement. The work begun in the secondary phase to address this has made a good start. Leaders need to ensure that they give the same priority to improving the teaching of early reading and the development of reading across the primary phase. Pupils who join the school and speak English as an additional language need immediate help with reading.
- The quality of teaching in the secondary phase is variable. Leaders have raised the bar, but in some departments further training is needed to improve teachers' subject knowledge. Leaders need to ensure that teachers cover knowledge in enough depth and detail, particularly in the subjects that contribute to the English baccalaureate. Leaders must also provide effective training for those teachers who are more challenged by some pupils' behaviour.
- The early years is not providing a good quality of education. Some adults are not prompting and questioning children enough. Some children have not developed good routines and are easily distracted. As a result, some children are not getting off to a good start. Leaders need to stabilise staffing and provide the new early years leader with the time and resources she needs to implement the curriculum effectively.
- The attendance of secondary pupils needs to improve. There are too many days being missed by pupils in key stage 4. Leaders need to ensure that their expectations for attendance are clearly communicated to families. The attendance team must continue to be tenacious and determined in its efforts to improve attendance.

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	135423
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10121710
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1475
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	151
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Susanna Kempe
Principal	David Thornton
Website	www.excelsiornewcastle.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	28-29 November 2017

Information about this school

- The current principal joined the school in October 2018 in an interim capacity. The trust has now recruited a new principal who will take up post in June of this year.
- The school has received funding through the Department for Education One Vision programme. Over the last year, the school has also been receiving support from an outstanding secondary school that has recently joined the trust.
- Excelsior Academy currently has a 'schools within a school' model. The schools include Rainbird Primary, Collingwood, Milburn and Hadrian secondary schools and Excelsior College Sixth Form. All of these schools are located in the same building. Senior leaders are in the process of restructuring senior leadership positions across these schools to strengthen lines of accountability.

- The school uses alternative education providers for a small number of secondary-aged pupils. The providers used are The Bridges School, Newcastle College, Newcastle Falconry Centre, Stepney Bank Stables and Kenton School.

Information about this inspection

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

- We met the principal and other senior leaders including the leaders of early years, primary education and the sixth form. We met the National Leader of Education who is supporting the school. We also met the trust's chief executive officer.
- We met the chair of the local governing body and six other governors.
- We focused on the quality of the curriculum across the full age range in mathematics, science and history. We also focused on the quality of the curriculum in Spanish across the secondary age range and reading and physical education in the primary school. We met the curriculum leaders for each subject, visited lessons, talked to pupils, looked at pupils' workbooks and talked to teachers.
- We looked at other information about behaviour, attendance, extra-curricular activities and wider activities that support pupils' personal development.
- We looked at pupils' punctuality, behaviour and conduct across the school day. The team held discussions with groups of pupils and listened to some younger pupils read. We also spoke to different members of staff, including newly qualified teachers and office staff, to gauge their views about how well pupils behave and conduct themselves. We also met some pupils who have received sanctions in the past.
- We looked at the vetting checks that leaders make on adults who work in the school. We also talked to the leader in charge of safeguarding arrangements. We looked at records of the actions taken by leaders to protect pupils at risk. The team spoke to pupils to check how safe they felt. We also checked whether members of staff understand and abide by the school's safeguarding policy.
- We looked at the 100 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. We also considered the 31 responses to Ofsted's parental survey, Parent View.

Inspection team

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