

# Inspection of Mary Astell Academy

Linhope Road, West Denton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE5 2LW

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Inspection dates: 8 and 9 June 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils join Mary Astell Academy because they have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or are at risk of being so. Leaders induct new pupils sensitively and support families at a time of uncertainty. The staff take time to assess pupils' educational needs. The school offers pupils the chance to make a fresh start.

Pupils are taught in small groups. Pupils told inspectors they like getting more individual attention from the staff. They find it easier to build positive relationships at this school. They feel safe. Everyone expects pupils to behave and try hard. Pupils are taught a broad curriculum that includes opportunities to pursue their interests, such as horse riding, skiing or baking.

Some pupils have lost heart because of their previous school experiences and do not attend as well as they should. Those who do typically improve their behaviour and begin to rebuild their self-esteem. Some pupils make good progress and achieve a range of qualifications. Last year, all pupils who finished Year 11 found a place in further education, employment or training.

The academy is calm and orderly. Incidents of poor behaviour are reducing. Bullying rarely happens, and pupils know whom to turn to if they have a concern. The staff make sure pupils are always well supervised.

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

Leaders have a clear vision for the academy's place and purpose within the city's educational landscape. They are working with the local authority and local secondary schools to develop this role. They are steadily building a valued provision. One parent reflected the views of others, saying, 'The school has been tremendously supportive, helpful, patient and ambitious for our child.'

The academy offers pupils a fresh start. There is a broad curriculum offer covering most academic subjects and vocational courses, including hair and beauty, food and catering, construction and uniformed services. Teachers focus on trying to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge. In key stage 4, pupils are entered for qualifications at different levels, including GCSE. Subject leaders have prepared well-sequenced schemes of work that broadly match the expectations of the national curriculum. Teachers follow the planned teaching sequence but divert from this at times to cover topics that pupils find more interesting and engaging.

Lessons are generally well resourced. However, some teachers lack the subject knowledge to get the most from lessons. For example, in mathematics, teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills. In English, pupils' weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar are not quickly addressed. In addition, teachers do not revisit and recap knowledge enough. This means pupils struggle to recall topics they have covered.

Teaching assistants support teachers in making sure pupils get ongoing help and support. However, adults could do more to adapt lessons to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Adults manage pupils' behaviour consistently. If pupils become restless or agitated, adults deal with it calmly. They are skilled at settling pupils down. Consequently, most pupils apply themselves in lessons and most take pride in their work. However, many pupils only attend school sporadically. This makes it hard for the staff to rekindle their interest in education. Leaders are challenging families more and now use a minibus to pick up some pupils each morning. Nevertheless, overall attendance remains low.

Provision for pupils' personal development is good. There is a well-planned curriculum, covering themes such as relationships, health, sex education and personal safety. Pupils enjoy learning about topics such as crime and punishment and racism. There are recreational opportunities for pupils to get out of school each week and demonstrate they can act responsibly. The staff arrange work experience for some pupils that helps to prepare them for their next steps. There are good opportunities for pupils to meet employers and apprenticeship providers.

Leaders are determined to give pupils a second chance. Where possible, they work to reintegrate pupils back into mainstream education. If necessary, staff continue to check on these pupils to make sure their transition to a new school is successful. Leaders have a good grasp of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. Their improvement plans indicate that they know what needs to be done in the coming year. The local advisory committee and trust board provide strong strategic oversight.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders give safeguarding a high priority. There is a team of well-trained safeguarding leaders who ensure that the safety of pupils remains high on everyone's agenda. Leaders use daily briefings to share relevant safeguarding information with the staff. A coordinated team of external agencies, including social care, health and education psychologists, works closely together to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils. The school's curriculum includes relevant topics such as knife crime, gangs and sexual harassment. This ensures pupils know about potential risks to their safety outside of school.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers teach several different subjects. Consequently, some lack the depth of subject knowledge to challenge pupils sufficiently. This means that some opportunities to extend pupils' knowledge are missed in lessons. Leaders should make sure they provide teachers with ongoing training and development that builds their subject knowledge further.
- Pupils are not remembering enough of the knowledge they are taught. This is because teachers are not revisiting important knowledge enough for pupils to grasp it fully. Subject leaders should ensure that teachers systematically revisit essential content to help pupils remember more of what they are taught.
- Some pupils enter the school with undiagnosed special educational needs. The school is quick to identify this. However, the support plans that are produced do not include precisely written strategies to help pupils. Consequently, teachers are not clear about how they can adapt lessons to overcome barriers to learning. Support plans should be revised to include more useful guidance for teachers.
- The lack of regular attendance is the biggest single barrier to pupils' success. Leaders need to leave no stone unturned in their efforts to improve attendance. Their approach should include doing everything possible to overcome the problems some pupils face in travelling to and from school.

## 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	144358
<b>Local authority</b>	Newcastle upon Tyne
<b>Inspection number</b>	10227636
<b>Type of school</b>	Alternative provision
<b>School category</b>	Academy alternative provision sponsored
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	69
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Joanne Clifford-Swan
<b>Executive headteacher</b>	Christopher Richardson
<b>Head of school</b>	Andrea Spowart
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.maryastellacademy.co.uk">www.maryastellacademy.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- Mary Astell Academy opened in January 2018 and is part of the Prosper Learning Trust.
- The school is an alternative provision academy that provides education for pupils aged from five to 16 years. Most pupils are referred by the local authority and have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. The academy also offers dual registered places for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion from schools within the local authority and beyond.
- The academy currently places 12 pupils into nine other alternative education providers. Five of these providers are unregistered.

## Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the interim executive headteacher, the head of school and other senior leaders. Inspectors also met with the interim chief executive officer of the trust.
- The inspectors also met with the chair of the trust and one other trustee and the chair of the local advisory committee (LAC) and members of the LAC.
- An inspector also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, English, science and food technology. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector met the special educational needs coordinator and scrutinised a selection of support plans for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors met different groups of pupils to discuss safety, personal development, well-being and behaviour.
- Inspectors met with leaders for safeguarding and reviewed records of the school's work to protect vulnerable pupils. An inspector looked at the record of vetting checks made on adults who work in the school.
- Inspectors considered responses to the staff and pupil surveys and responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

## Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christina Jones

Ofsted Inspector

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