

Inspection of North Durham Academy

High Street, Stanley, County Durham DH9 0TW

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Providing an ambitious and engaging curriculum that meets the needs of pupils is at the heart of what leaders do at this school. The changes leaders have made have improved the school substantially. The pace of change continues. As one pupil told an inspector, 'Behaviour has improved allowing the school to prioritise learning'.

Leaders are reflective and are keen to build on the work which has already taken place with the wider community. Inspectors witnessed transition visits to help pupils prepare for life at the school.

Pupils feel safe. They know who to speak to if they are anxious or worried. Pupils and parents can ask for help by using the 'Speak out Safely' reporting button on the school's website. Leaders have worked with pupils to reduce bullying. Pupils said if they report incidents staff do deal with them.

Lessons are calm and match the expectations of leaders to create an environment where pupils want to learn. Beyond the classroom clubs, trips and activities broaden pupils' experiences. For example, the trip to Derwentside College, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, jamming sessions in music at lunchtime and board game club.

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

Leaders have galvanised the staff in their efforts to improve the school. A curriculum is in place which is broad and balanced. Leaders' fundamental belief is that all pupils should and can access the curriculum offered.

The curriculums in English, mathematics, science and history are well thought out. Key knowledge has been identified through collaborative planning with teachers. However, some subject areas are not as well developed.

In the past, the number of pupils who study all the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) has declined. This has been addressed and the number of pupils who study EBacc subjects is rising year-on-year.

Staff appreciate the training opportunities provided. Teachers described how training has helped them to refine their classroom practice. Inspectors saw this in action during lesson visits. For example, where literacy and vocabulary were broken down to help pupils understand the meaning of the subject-specific terms.

Teachers select activities and tasks which make pupils recall previous learning. One pupil commented, 'This helps cement knowledge in your memory'. Pupils described this as part of the normal routine.

Leaders are clear that reading is a vital part of the curriculum. Pupils are exposed to a variety of different texts and opportunities to read in lessons across the curriculum. Staff know the pupils who are at the early stages of reading. Support through phonics and one-to-one help is in place to help them.

Leaders have recently strengthened provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff receive information about each pupil which includes details about their specific needs. Inspectors observed this information being used to overcome potential barriers to learning. However, there are some instances where the use of this information to assist and help learning over time was weaker. Leaders are aware of this.

Staff have high expectations in relation to pupils' conduct. When pupils do not meet the expectations, the behaviour policy is applied. An awareness of the needs of pupils who need extra support in managing their behaviour was evident. There are fewer instances of poor behaviour resulting in suspension. The devoted pastoral team have been successful in ensuring more pupils attend school on a regular basis.

A coordinated approach to personal development in tutor sessions, assemblies and the life curriculum is in place. The school's core principles of inclusion, progression and excellence are woven through the offer. Pupils receive comprehensive careers guidance and support which meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Trustees and governors have a precise focus on providing the best opportunities for pupils to flourish. They are astute and have a range of experience and skills that allow them to offer support and challenge where and when needed.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility at North Durham Academy. Leaders ensure that staff are trained and receive regular safeguarding updates. Staff appreciate the importance of positive relationships with the pupils and the community. They know how to report any concerns they may have.

Diligent checks are carried out on employees and visitors to the school. Safer recruitment trained leaders are in place and form part of the appointment process.

Leaders work with a variety of external agencies to help pupils who need support.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders in most subjects have well-planned and sequenced curriculums. Where subject curriculums are less developed, there is reliance on experienced staff to deliver the curriculum. Leaders must ensure they continue to embed well-planned curriculums in all subject areas.
- Leaders have made significant changes to support pupils with SEND. However, some pupils do not always learn or remember important knowledge. Leaders know this. They should ensure they continue to monitor and review the recent changes made to the provision and sharing of information. This will allow leaders to judge whether the changes they have made are having the intended impact on pupils with SEND.

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

Unique reference number	136745
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10229098
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	981
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Karl Fairley
Principal	Mark Gray
Website	http://www.northdurhamacademy.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	3 and 4 October 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2002

Information about this school

- The school is part of the New College Durham Academies Trust.
- The school is a close to average-size secondary school.
- The headteacher joined the school in June 2022.
- The school makes use of six alternative providers.

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 the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders and the chief executive officer of the trust. They also met with the trustees and governors.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, design and technology and history. These involved meeting with subject leaders, visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to pupils and staff.
- Information regarding pupils' attendance and behaviour was scrutinised.
- To judge the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors read the school's relevant policies, scrutinised the single central record, checked the school's procedures for the safe recruitment of staff and met with the designated safeguarding lead. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils.
- The inspection team spoke to staff about behaviour and their workload in the school. The responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils, staff and parents were also considered.

Inspection team

Richard Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jamie Lawler	Ofsted Inspector
Michelle Farr	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Lounds	Ofsted Inspector

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