

Inspection of Walker Riverside Academy

Waverdale Avenue, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE6 4AW

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have a clear vision and ambition for pupils to become socially, culturally, globally and self-aware. Many aspects of the school's work help to realise this vision. However, leaders have not developed a suitable curriculum in music and most pupils have had no access to the teaching of music over time. This inhibits their cultural development.

Pupils enjoy school. In many subjects, they access a well-planned curriculum. Students in the sixth form are full of praise for their teachers, who give them excellent support. However, in some subjects, the curriculum is not planned well enough to meet the needs of some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Some do not receive the support they need in lessons.

Pupils and staff get on very well. This helps pupils to feel happy, safe and secure. They know who to turn to in school if they need help. Leaders respond robustly whenever bullying is reported.

Pupils are welcoming to visitors. Pupils who are part of the Combined Cadet Force wear their military uniform with pride around school. There is a strong community spirit. Older pupils stay after school to help younger pupils who have English as an additional language. Pupils are proud to help their peers.

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

There is a gap in the curriculum that leaders provide for pupils. Music has not been taught for several years and trustees and local governors were unaware that this subject was missing from the curriculum. Having struggled initially to recruit a specialist teacher, leaders have not taken sufficient action to provide pupils with a suitable music curriculum. Only a very small minority of pupils access some extra-curricular music activities. This means that, for most pupils, music has not been part of their educational experience. Leaders have very recently appointed a music teacher for September 2022. Curriculum plans for music are currently being developed.

The lines of communication between the local governing body and the board of trustees are not effective. While governors have a keen eye on some aspects of the school, such as safeguarding, they do not have sufficient oversight of other aspects, such as the quality of education. As a result, they have not held leaders to account well enough and some key issues around the quality of education in school have gone unaddressed.

Leaders have developed a well-planned curriculum in many subject areas. This supports many pupils to build their knowledge well over time. In some subjects, leaders have designed a curriculum that enables pupils with SEND to achieve well. For example, in mathematics, teachers adapt the curriculum to address pupils'

additional needs. In other subjects, such as English, the curriculum design does not help some pupils with SEND to achieve as well as they should. Some teachers do not use the information that they are given to help them to consider and meet the needs of pupils with SEND in lessons. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Contrastingly, in the sixth form, students with SEND are very well supported. Students who attend as part of a partnership with a local special school receive effective support and a well-considered curriculum. Teachers present information clearly to students. Staff consider students' individual needs and address them. The curriculum effectively prepares students in the sixth form for adulthood.

Assessment is well used by teachers. Targeted time is dedicated in lessons so that pupils can demonstrate how well they have learned new knowledge. This helps teachers to spot when pupils have misunderstood something and address it.

A growing number of pupils arrive in Year 7 with gaps in their reading knowledge. Leaders have invested in reading programmes to support pupils with reading. These are helping pupils to catch up. Some staff do not have the expertise to help and support those pupils who are struggling most with reading. This limits the effectiveness of the support those pupils receive.

Pupils behave well. Lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. There has been significant investment to address historical challenges around attendance. The pandemic has hampered leaders' progress in this area. Poor attenders are closely monitored. Interventions are put in place to encourage pupils to attend well. Students in the sixth form have been well supported to improve their attendance. This is because leaders understand students' individual barriers to good attendance and address them.

Weekly personal development lessons prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. They have a clear understanding of equality and those with protected characteristics. Pupils are accepting of difference. Pupils are well cared for through effective pastoral support. There is high-quality careers advice for pupils. The school has extensive links with local employers. Students in the sixth form have meaningful opportunities to experience the world of work.

Leaders engage well with staff. The vast majority of staff feel well supported with their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have clear oversight of safeguarding. Staff receive frequent safeguarding training. This keeps them up to date with emerging safeguarding trends in the local community. As a result, staff know what risks pupils might face, what to look for,

and how to pass on a concern. Safeguarding logs are detailed and clear. Action to help pupils who may be at risk is taken in a timely manner.

Pupils get regular information about safeguarding through the personal development programme. This helps them to learn about drugs, county lines, and that sexualised language is unacceptable.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Over time, local governors and trustees have not had a sharp enough focus on the quality of education. They do not have a clear picture of the breadth of the curriculum on offer in the school or the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of education. There is a disconnect between the local governing body and board of trustees which means that, collectively, those responsible for governance do not have effective oversight of the school. Trustees should take action to ensure that they, and others responsible for governance, have the necessary skills and expertise to hold leaders to account for the quality of education.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils access a suitable curriculum for music. This has limited pupils' cultural development over time. Leaders should ensure that a suitable music education is provided for pupils to equip them with the cultural capital that they need to succeed in life.
- In some subjects, the curriculum is not planned well to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Some teachers do not make suitable use of the information they are given to help them to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not achieve well. Leaders should ensure that the curriculums in each subject are planned to take account of the needs of pupils with SEND. Leaders should also ensure that staff make effective use of the range of information about pupils with SEND so that teachers provide the right support to help pupils with SEND to achieve well.

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	145528
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10227630
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1145
Of which, number on roll in the sixth-form	45
Appropriate authority	Board of Trustees
Chair of trust	Leslie Watson
Headteacher	Gareth Smith
Website	www.walker.academy
Date of previous inspection	12 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Walker Riverside Academy converted to become an academy school in March 2018. When its predecessor school, Walker Technology College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is a part of the Tyne Coast Academy Trust. The current headteacher took up post in April 2022. The previous headteacher is now the deputy chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust.
- Around 50 pupils are dual-registered with four other registered providers. Most of these are Year 9 pupils who attend North East Futures UTC, which is part of the same trust. A small number of pupils are dual-registered with Newcastle Bridges School, Mary Astell Academy and Cumbric.
- Most students in the sixth form are dual-registered with Sir Charles Parsons School. A small proportion of sixth-form students study a level 3 qualification in health and social care alongside level 2 English and mathematics courses.

- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This requires schools to provide information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships to pupils in Years 8 to 13.

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 this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders including the deputy CEO of the trust, during the inspection.
- The lead inspector held a virtual meeting with members of board of trustees, including the vice-chair of trustees. The lead inspector also met with members of the local governing body, including the chair. Inspectors reviewed several documents relating to governance, including the scheme of delegation, minutes from local governing body meetings, reports provided to governors by senior leaders and an external review of governance.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, history, modern foreign languages and health and social care. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with other curriculum and senior leaders to discuss the curriculum. Inspectors also considered curriculum planning and visited lessons in other subjects.
- Inspectors visited a sample of sixth-form lessons and met with leaders responsible for the sixth form.
- An inspector visited the North East Futures UTC to consider the arrangements in place to support pupils. An inspector held telephone conversations with two other registered providers used by the school.
- Inspectors met with the leader responsible for reading, visited reading interventions, reading lessons and listened to pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- To inspect the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, the lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead. Inspectors reviewed safeguarding logs, as well as the school's single central record. Inspectors spoke with staff, pupils and governors about their safeguarding knowledge.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for personal development, visited a Combined Cadet Force session and spoke to pupils participating in the session.
- Inspectors met with leaders who are responsible for behaviour and attendance as well as reviewing attendance and behaviour information.

- Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils throughout the inspection, both formally and informally. This includes students in the sixth form. Inspectors also observed break and lunchtime arrangements.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff given through Ofsted’s questionnaires were considered by inspectors.
- A range of school documents was reviewed, including the school’s self-evaluation and external reviews conducted by a school improvement partner.

Inspection team

Graham Findlay, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Gill Booth	Ofsted Inspector
Julie McGrane	Ofsted Inspector
Lindsay Oyston	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew West	Ofsted Inspector

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