

Inspection of Walbottle Academy

Hexham Road, Walbottle, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE15 9TP

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 January 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Walbottle Academy has undergone a transformation in recent years. Staff describe the change as 'monumental'. Older students say it 'feels like a different place'. Trust leaders have taken swift and decisive action to bring about rapid improvements across all areas of school life. They have set high expectations for what pupils can achieve. Pupils are rising to this challenge.

Pupils are safe and happy here. They feel strongly that pupils treat each other with respect. Pupils explain that bullying is taken very seriously by staff. They feel confident reporting it if it does occur. Leaders ensure that bullying is not a problem at this school. This is now an inclusive community, where pupils feel accepted.

Pupils value the new rewards systems that celebrate attendance and academic achievement. They are proud of what they achieve. Leaders have created a positive culture, where success is recognised. Pupils' behaviour around school is orderly and well managed by staff. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive.

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

Leaders have introduced a new, ambitious curriculum across all subject areas. They have ensured that the range of courses available at key stages 4 and 5 are well matched to pupils' aspirations. Leaders have thought carefully about exactly what pupils will learn. Leaders have also considered how different subjects will support each other. Learning in mathematics is carefully linked to content in science. Knowledge from music is linked to what pupils have already learned in history. Leaders have ensured that vocabulary is central to pupils' learning across school.

All teachers regularly check what pupils have remembered over time. Teachers are able to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge quickly. Assessment is closely matched to what pupils have learned. Students in the sixth form particularly value the clear sense of progress this gives them.

Leaders have also prioritised staff training to make sure this curriculum is delivered effectively. The impact of this is clear in core subjects, where results for pupils are improving rapidly. Ongoing training for staff continues to improve standards of teaching across the academy. Leaders have considered how to address gaps in knowledge that older pupils may have.

Staff are well trained about how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils with SEND access the same ambitious curriculum alongside their peers. Some pupils with more complex needs are effectively supported in internal provision spaces in school. They appreciate this more specialised support.

Leaders have introduced clear systems to address gaps for pupils in numeracy and literacy. Pupils who find reading or mathematics more difficult receive additional support to make sure they can catch up quickly. Students in the sixth form value being involved in reading mentor schemes with younger pupils.

Behaviour in lessons is calm and focused. Pupils are engaged in their learning. They applaud each other to celebrate impressive answers. Staff have high expectations for pupils' participation and behaviour. Pupils understand the behaviour system and know that it is used consistently by staff. For pupils whose behaviour is more challenging, there is a range of support in place to help them make better choices. These systems are having an impact. The number of suspensions is reducing swiftly. However, it remains high.

Leaders have focused heavily on raising attendance. They have introduced rigorous systems to increase pupils' attendance. Their work is ongoing and is having some impact. Broadly, pupils attend well. Attendance in the sixth form is strong. However, there remains a group of pupils who do not attend school regularly enough. This is particularly the case for some pupils with SEND.

Pupils' wider development is well considered through 'Life' lessons and tutor time activities. This provision extends throughout school, including for sixth-form students. Pupils learn about important topics, such as online safety, mental health and healthy relationships. They talk clearly about diversity and equality. Pupils are clear that discrimination has no place in this school. Pupils can explain the importance of ambassador roles to promote important issues, including anti-bullying and cultural awareness.

Trust leaders have unapologetically focused on the 'life chances' for pupils. This moral purpose has driven rapid improvement. Leaders ensure that parents are kept well informed about school life. However, parents comment it is difficult to contact school to discuss issues.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the changes that new leadership has brought to the school. They feel well supported by leaders. Staff appreciate that their workload is considered. Staff explain they are now able to do the best for their pupils due to significant improvements in behaviour. They are now proud to work at this school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that staff, pupils and parents all regularly receive key messages about important safeguarding issues. Leaders are acutely aware of the risks that pupils may face in their community. Leaders make sure that pupils understand these risks. Staff are well informed about how to report any concerns they might have. They are highly attentive to pupils' well-being.

Pupils feel safe in school. They are confident to report any concerns that they have. Pupils trust that staff will take their concerns seriously and take action when necessary. The records that staff keep confirm this. Leaders track pupils who are more vulnerable closely. They ensure that pupils and families get the right support at the right time.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While on a declining trend, suspensions are still high. Some pupils are still making poor choices. This means that pupils who are suspended are missing out on specialist teaching. Leaders should ensure that the behaviour system improves the behaviour of all pupils, so that suspensions continue to reduce.
- Although attendance is improving, some pupils still do not attend regularly enough. This is particularly true of some pupils with SEND. This absence will inevitably have a negative impact on the education of these pupils. Leaders should ensure that systems to improve attendance continue to reduce persistent absence.
- Some parents feel it is difficult to contact school to share information or discuss concerns. This leads to frustration over not being able to communicate effectively with staff. Leaders should ensure that parents have better avenues to communicate with 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.

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	148135
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10255570
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	1637
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	165
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Sanders
Principal	Martin Wood
Website	https://wba.northerneducationtrust.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Walbottle Academy joined Northern Education Trust in September 2020.
- A small number of pupils attend seven alternative providers. Four are registered providers. Three are unregistered providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded 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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors spoke with the chief executive officer of the trust, a trustee and the chair of the academy council. Inspectors met with the principal, the executive principal and the senior executive principal. They also met with leaders responsible for safeguarding and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENDCO).
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, English, history, art, science and performing arts. 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.
- Inspectors also met with leaders responsible for reading, numeracy and provision for disadvantaged pupils.
- Inspectors met with the SENDCO and visited provisions in school for pupils with SEND. Inspectors also checked how pupils with SEND were supported in lessons. They spoke with a range of pupils with SEND throughout the inspection. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documentation regarding provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors spoke to a wide range of staff and pupils about safeguarding in school. They checked logs of actions taken to keep pupils safe. An inspector checked the single central record and documentation related to safer recruitment.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of behaviour and attendance data.
- Inspectors spoke with a wide range of pupils who have experienced behaviour sanctions.
- An inspector visited an unregistered alternative provision. An inspector spoke with a home tutor provision by telephone.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils at social times and during lessons.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for the wider development of pupils and relationships education. They also met with the leaders responsible for careers education, information and guidance.
- Inspectors met with the leader responsible for the sixth form. They spoke with a range of sixth-form pupils across the inspection, formally and informally.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and the minutes of academy council meetings.

- Inspectors considered the responses to the staff and pupil survey. They also considered the responses to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire and additional communications from parents.

Inspection team

Katie Spurr, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Garry Stout	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew West	Ofsted Inspector
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