

Inspection of Emily Wilding Davison School

Thornhill Road, Ponteland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northumberland NE23 7EB

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 January 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has been through a period of substantial turbulence in leadership and staffing since its move to the current site. As a result, the behaviour of a number of pupils is challenging. Some pupils leave their classes and wander the corridors at will. They swear at each other and at staff, block doors, shout, and kick doors and walls. Staff are working hard to resolve this situation. It is made more difficult because of a shortage of employed staff who know the pupils well.

The quality of education has suffered, since the transition onto the new site, because the staff's attention is on managing pupils' behaviour. Just under half of the pupils on roll experience a part-time and off-site education. Leaders are using this strategy while they establish a new behaviour policy following the move into the new buildings. In some subjects, pupils have completed virtually no work this academic year. The curriculum is not ambitious enough. Important subjects which prepare pupils for adult life have been withdrawn or are not offered.

In some curriculum areas, pupils produce work of a high standard with teachers who know their subjects well. Leaders and staff care deeply about the young people on roll at the school. There are some strong relationships between staff and pupils.

Inspectors found no evidence that bullying is an issue in school. All of the pupils who spoke to inspectors feel safe in school.

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

The local authority (LA), leaders (including governors) and staff agree that the transition to the current site and the admission of new pupils was not handled well. All parties were motivated by the desire to provide a high-quality education for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Despite everyone's best intentions, the reality is that flawed transition planning and delivery have led to the school facing difficulties. School leaders say that the lack of readiness of the buildings at the new site, together with the significant increase in the number of pupils on roll and a difficulty in recruiting staff, have produced what the LA call a perfect storm. The impact of this is that, to give leaders time and space to manage the poor behaviour of some pupils as a result of the transition, just under half of the pupils on roll are currently on part-time timetables and/or placed in alternative provision (AP). Initially intended as a temporary solution, this had been the case for over half a term at the time of this inspection.

There are numerous staff vacancies. These are making the job of leaders even harder. On a day-to-day basis, leaders rely on supply staff to ensure there are enough adults in the school to keep pupils safe. Constant behaviour management means that leaders do not have the capacity to address the school's improvement

priorities. Delayed priorities, as a consequence of the impact of the flawed transition process, include training for staff in how to use pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans, essential safeguarding training; support for teachers at different points in their career; and the creation of curriculum planning across subjects. Leaders are committed and energetic, but the short time they have had in their roles is limiting the impact of their work. They are stretched beyond capacity.

The quality of education overall is weak. Staff make no, or limited, reference to pupils' EHC plans in their curriculum planning or teaching. In some subjects, pupils have completed little work. In subjects such as art and physical education, some pupils produce high-quality work. The graffiti project in art, for instance, inspired pupils. However, curriculum plans in these subjects do not set out the detailed content pupils should learn and in what order. Pupils choose what they want to do in some subjects, partly to keep them engaged. However, these pupils do not learn essential subject knowledge in an organised way. Consequently, pupils do not achieve as highly as they could.

The new leadership team has introduced some appropriate subject courses, such as construction. They have narrowed the curriculum by withdrawing the teaching of computing. Many pupils have the academic ability to, and do, achieve grades at GCSE and BTEC level. Leaders take the views of pupils into account when making curriculum decisions, but pupils are not able to study a wider range of subjects, such as history and geography. The level of ambition for such pupils is, therefore, too low.

Leaders do not use assessment effectively and consistently to identify and meet pupils' needs. In the foundation area, pupils across four classes are doing the same work with the same outcomes. This is despite leaders' assertion that they adapt the curriculum for each class.

Leaders have not coordinated what pupils are learning at school and/or AP with the work packs sent home for those who are on part-time timetables. The curriculum is disjointed for these pupils.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have introduced a phonics-based reading scheme for the weakest readers. This is beginning to bring about improvements in early reading for these pupils.

Many pupils behave well. However, a substantial number do not. Leaders state that they are in the process of regaining control and are, at the same time, introducing new behaviour policies. Suspensions are high and increasing because consequences are being applied in line with the new policies.

The provision for pupils' personal development is weak. Curriculum plans are in place, but are limited in content. Some leaders themselves have a poor understanding of crucial aspects of personal development, such as the protected characteristics. There is no coherent plan for what, or when, the pupils in AP are to be taught about relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education.

Similarly, leaders do not have a coordinated plan for pupils in AP to receive careers information, education, advice and guidance (CIEAG).

Despite the challenges faced by the school, staff are supportive of leaders. They feel listened to, including about helping to make their workload manageable.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is not effective.

Firstly, leaders have fallen behind in their programme for training all staff in the 'Prevent' duty, with a substantial number of staff untrained. Secondly, leaders have not secured written confirmation from the AP settings used by the school that all staff have had the necessary safeguarding checks, as set out in the government's statutory guidance 'Keeping children safe in education 2022'. At inspectors' direction, leaders began to get the necessary confirmations from the AP settings during the inspection. Thirdly, leaders could not describe with clarity and certainty the safeguarding arrangements for checking on pupils who were attending AP.

On a day-to-day basis in school, leaders have ensured that they have systems in place to identify pupils who may be at risk, to support them and to liaise with relevant external agencies to help them. The school's single central record of recruitment checks complies with requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum does not meet the needs of the pupils who attend Emily Wilding Davison School on a full- or part-time basis. As a result, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. Leaders should improve the quality of the curriculum with urgency.
- Leaders have not coordinated the curriculum for pupils who are learning at school with those who are attending AP. Consequently, these pupils do not achieve well. Leaders should ensure that they have a coherent and coordinated curriculum in place for pupils not attending school on a full-time basis.
- Staff do not use pupils' EHC plans as part of curriculum planning or teaching. As a result, pupils do not receive the adaptive support they need to achieve as highly as they could. Leaders should ensure that staff are trained in the use of EHC plans to support their teaching and improve the learning of all pupils.
- Leaders have made decisions which have reduced, or limited, the curriculum which is on offer for pupils with cognitive ability at least the equal of their peers in mainstream schools. The ambitions for what some pupils could achieve are too

low. Leaders should review their curriculum strategy so that all pupils achieve the best possible next steps at the end of Year 11.

- Curriculum plans in a number of subjects lack detail about precisely what subject knowledge and skills are to be taught and in what order, building to the completion of national awards at the end of Year 11. As a result, pupils do not have sufficient understanding of central subject concepts and do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders should improve the quality of education by ensuring that curriculum plans in all subjects are precise in their subject content, skills and disciplinary knowledge, so that pupils learn subject components in a logical, cumulative sequence.
- The behaviour of a substantial number of pupils is poor. This poor behaviour is affecting the quality of education for all pupils. Leaders, including governors, should continue to work with the LA to review current behaviour policies and strengthen the strategy so that pupils' behaviour improves significantly.
- The rate of pupils' attendance is low. As with behaviour, leaders should work with the LA to review current attendance policy and practice, and strengthen the strategy where required.
- The provision for pupils' personal development lacks clarity and detail. Some leaders do not have a secure understanding of what the protected characteristics are, or where and how they are taught in the curriculum. Leaders do not know what elements of the statutory requirements for RSE and health education, and CIEAG, are taught in the APs used by the school, or indeed if they are taught at all. There is no coordination of these requirements between school and home for those pupils on part-time timetables. As a result, pupils are not adequately prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders should ensure that staff are trained in statutory requirements for equalities, RSE and health education and CIEAG, and that curriculum plans set out with detail and clarity what is to be taught, when and where.
- Leaders must ensure that all staff are trained in the 'Prevent' duty, and that written confirmation of safeguarding checks at the APs used by the school are secured as a matter of urgency.
- Leaders and those responsible for governance may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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	132771
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10260896
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Harrison
Headteacher	Michael Hutchison
Website	http://www.atkinsonhouse.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 and 31 January 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school moved to the current site at the start of September 2022. At the time of the previous inspection, the school was called Atkinson House school.
- The school admitted new pupils when it changed site, increasing the number on roll from 75 to 99 pupils. It also started to admit female pupils at the same time.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. In the main, this is for social, emotional and mental health needs, and autism spectrum disorder.
- The previous headteacher resigned in the 2022 autumn term. The current postholder is the acting headteacher, and took up the post in November 2022
- There has been significant turbulence in leadership and in staffing since the move to the current site. All members of the school's senior leadership team are new, temporary, or carrying more than one substantial senior responsibility. The special educational needs coordinator took up the role in September 2022. The designated safeguarding leader is also the lead for pupils' behaviour and attendance. The leader with responsibility for the curriculum in English, mathematics and science since October 2022, is also the temporary 'teaching and

learning' leader. The assistant headteacher is on secondment from another school and took up the role a week before the inspection. The leader for 'data and progress' took up role in October 2022. There are new curriculum leaders for the creative subjects and for the foundation area.

- To assist leaders in managing the challenges presented by the transition to the new site, the LA has provided a substantial amount of support throughout the autumn term 2022, in the form of an advisory headteacher from a special school, the seconded assistant headteacher and staff from the LA's SEND team. The LA has also spent a substantial sum of money in developing the school building. At the point of inspection, the LA SEND staff and the advisory headteacher had ceased their on-site support. A behaviour consultant and a school improvement consultant continue to work with the school. The refurbishment of the premises is close to completion.
- Just under half of pupils attend the school on a part-time basis and have been doing so since at least October 2022. Some of these pupils are also attending AP. In total, a fifth of pupils are attending AP.
- Leaders send pupils to nine unregistered AP settings and one registered independent school. In addition, leaders use a business provider to arrange work experience placements for pupils.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- 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 acting headteacher, the seconded assistant headteacher and other senior leaders. Inspectors spoke with the director of education and the deputy director of education for Northumberland. Inspectors also spoke with the school's improvement partner. Inspectors viewed the school development plan.
- An inspector met with the chair of governors and the two vice-chairs.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art and physical education. 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 also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in 'humanities'.

- An inspector visited two of the unregistered AP settings and spoke to some of the school's pupils who attend them. The inspector spoke on the telephone to another of the unregistered AP settings.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors met with senior leaders with responsibility for safeguarding policy and practice. Inspectors reviewed the school's checks on staff who work at the school and reviewed case files of at-risk pupils who are being supported. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils in meetings and around the school site, about safeguarding. Inspectors checked leaders' understanding of, and compliance with, statutory safeguarding duties.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys of staff and parents, and spoke with a parent on the telephone.

Inspection team

Steve Shaw, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Birch

Ofsted Inspector

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