

Inspection of The Academy at Shotton Hall

Passfield Way, Peterlee, County Durham SR8 1AU

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 July 2024

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Alexandra Hook. This school is part of North East Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lesley Powell, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Margaret Saxton.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since July 2013.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils appreciate the exceptional education they receive at The Academy at Shotton Hall. The wider community are proud of the contribution the school makes to the town. Pupils strive to meet the school's high expectations in all aspects of school life. They flourish in this happy, safe and successful school.

Pupils are highly motivated to engage in precisely planned lessons. This enables them to become skilled in the subject. Staff connect pupils' knowledge to the real world. This inspires pupils to learn more. Pupils discover how each subject can lead to future careers. This all helps them achieve exceptional outcomes in public examinations and take ambitious next steps when they leave.

Pupils and staff have a relentless focus on academic achievement. This is possible due to the impeccable behaviour throughout the school. Pupils show high levels of respect for staff and their peers. They are exceptionally tolerant of others. Pupils are also empowered to speak out if they have concerns. This supportive environment helps to shape pupils to become confident, articulate and kind.

Pupils' personal development is a thread that runs through an academic core. The curriculum is skilfully linked to citizenship. For example, pupils enjoy connecting British values to speeches in English. Pupils also become leaders and mentors in the school. In addition, they enjoy a rich variety of exciting wider opportunities. They try new things, visit new places and listen to expert speakers.

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

The quality of education at the school has been impressive over time. Pupils' outcomes across the curriculum are consistently higher than national and regional averages. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The high standards throughout school help pupils of all backgrounds and abilities make rapid progress.

Staff refine the curriculum in individual subjects on a regular basis. They ensure the aims of the curriculum are clear for every teacher and pupil. Pupils learn and use ambitious subject-specific vocabulary in each topic. Teachers also clearly model their expectations for pupils. For example, in Year 9 art, teachers show pupils shading techniques. They do this in carefully sequenced steps. This includes grip, blending and multi-directional pencil strokes. Pupils then use these techniques successfully in their own sketchbooks. As a result, the quality of pupils' artwork improves and develops rapidly.

Provision to support pupils' reading is a significant strength of the school. Detailed assessments are undertaken when pupils join the school. This informs swift interventions. Trained teachers support pupils to rapidly close gaps in their reading ability. Interventions are tightly matched to the English curriculum. This enhances pupils' learning in the subject further. Reading weaves skilfully through each

curriculum subject. Pupils enjoy learning about historical figures in mathematics and science. They do this through guided reading tasks. They also enjoy reading aloud. Teachers develop pupils' confidence in reading through a range of effective whole-class techniques. The school ensures pupils can access books to read for pleasure. Pupils enjoy being members of an online library. They also benefit from a thriving library space in school. Here, pupils read quietly or proudly take on the role of school librarian.

Pupils' exemplary behaviour underpins the strong curriculum. Around school, they display high levels of self-control. Staff intervention is rarely needed. If pupils do make mistakes, the school takes rapid action. Staff help pupils learn from their mistakes. As a result, repeated incidents are extremely low. Pupils' engagement in the school also leads to high rates of attendance.

The school provides extensive opportunities to educate pupils beyond the academic curriculum. This recently included adapting assemblies and lesson content to reflect the general election. Pupils have a deep understanding of the world around them. They are confident in discussing a range of important topics, including online safety. Some share their thoughts with peers through their pupil-led podcast 'Speak Out'. The school ensures careers education is everyone's responsibility in the school. Meaningful links to careers are expertly embedded into every curriculum area in the school. Leaders are also keen to ensure the school is as fun and vibrant as it is academic. Pupils and staff relish the 'open mic' event during Friday breaktime. They also look forward to the end-of-term activities week and 'colour run' with great enthusiasm.

Leaders and governors unite in their commitment to providing an exceptional education. Leaders ensure the school's priorities are evidence-based and impactful. These priorities are then embedded relentlessly. Staff are skilled in their roles. They enjoy high-quality and bespoke professional development. They lead other staff across the trust. Staff are effusive about working in the school. They enjoy the thoughtful well-being initiatives the school has put in place. Parents also appreciate the opportunities the school provides. Many describe it as a 'fantastic' place that has improved outcomes for their child.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136451
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10350318
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	1162
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Margaret Saxton
CEO of the trust	Lesley Powell
Headteacher	Alexandra Hook
Website	www.shottonhallacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 July 2013, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- The school is the founding member of the North East Learning Trust multi-academy trust.
- The school is a research school which is part of a national network. The school also runs school-centred initial teacher training for trainee teachers.
- The school does not currently use alternative education provisions for its pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's

education provision.

- 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 and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders over the course of the inspection. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the trust board and two trustees. They also met with the chair of the local academy council and two governors. The lead inspector reviewed documentation relating to governance, including minutes from governor meetings.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in the following curriculum areas: English, mathematics, science, geography and art. 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. The inspectors also spoke to leaders about history and modern foreign languages and looked at samples of pupils' work in these subjects.
- An inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for personal development, including careers.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors met with groups of pupils formally throughout the inspection and spoke with them informally at social times and in lessons.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff formally during the inspection and spoke with them informally throughout the inspection.
- A range of school documents was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, parents and staff gathered through Ofsted's questionnaires.

Inspection team

Hannah Millett, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Dan McKeating	His Majesty's Inspector
Adam Ryder	Ofsted Inspector
Jayne Gaunt	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Gammack	Ofsted Inspector

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