

St Aidan's Church of England Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135314
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	345469
Inspection dates	27–28 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	582
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Granville Gibson
Principal	Mrs Alison Appleyard
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors spent almost half of the inspection looking at learning and students' progress. Inspectors observed 22 lessons and held meetings with representatives of the sponsors and the governing body, the principal, the vice principal and senior and middle leaders, staff, groups of students and two parents. They observed the academy's work, and looked at external evaluations of the academy's effectiveness, students' books, the academy's policies and its self-evaluation and improvement planning and 35 parental, 91 student and 33 staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness of the academy's strategies to improve attendance and reduce exclusions
- the robustness of the academy's self-evaluation and the impact of any steps taken to bring about improvement
- the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements
- the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on students' achievement.

Information about the school

The academy opened in September 2007 in the same building as its predecessor school. Its opening was accelerated. The academy moved into its new building on a new site in September 2009. It changed its name from Eastbourne Church of England Academy to St Aidan's Church of England Academy at that time. The sponsors are the Church of England and David and Anne Crossland. Most of the staff from the predecessor school transferred into the academy and staffing has remained stable. The principal, vice principal and a very small number of senior and middle leaders were appointed to the academy. A director of specialism was appointed in April 2008. The specialism is business and enterprise. All students from the predecessor school transferred into the academy. Most students are of White British heritage, there are some students of Irish Traveller heritage and very small numbers of students from other ethnic groups, including some Polish and Eastern European students that are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average but only a very small proportion of students has a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The academy has made significant progress in all aspects of its development. The sponsors and the governing body have high aspirations for young people in their care. These are brought to fruition through the hard work and determination of the principal and the senior leadership team. The senior team plan the steps in the academy's development very carefully. They have established a range of secure systems to monitor and evaluate the academy's work and are creating increasingly effective leadership at all levels.

When students join the academy their attainment is well below average and many of the oldest students have a considerable legacy of underachievement. Many students have weak literacy skills. Students' attainment, as measured by the outcomes of national examinations at Key Stage 4, is low but improving steadily. In 2009 provisional results show more students gained five or more GCSE A* to C grades than did so in 2008. The proportion attaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics also improved. Girls' attainment was higher than that of boys and better than their peers nationally. There are no published results for the academy's specialism but internal assessments provide a positive picture of students' progress and attainment.

The academy's data show that students of all ages and abilities are making at least satisfactory progress. Students in Years 7 and 8 are progressing at a faster rate than those in other year groups. Students make satisfactory progress in most lessons. Teachers plan lessons carefully and have a clear focus on what they want to achieve. However, many do not focus sufficiently well on how students will learn. In some lessons students make good progress because teachers use information from day-to-day, or longer term assessments, to plan work which meets the needs of every student in the class. In these lessons students work on a variety of interesting tasks which help them to consolidate their knowledge and understanding or eradicate weaknesses in their basic skills. There are currently too few lessons of this quality. A very small minority of teachers do not implement the academy's policies, particularly those relating to literacy and marking. As a result some long standing weaknesses, particularly in students' written work, remain.

Students' behaviour has improved significantly. Behaviour in most lessons is good and students move around the academy very sensibly considering the needs of others and treating new resources with respect. During the first two years of the academy's life a very high proportion of students were excluded, some on a permanent basis. In the last year exclusions have declined significantly as have the proportion of internal exclusions from lessons. Students and their parents say that they feel safe because incidents of bullying, aggression and poor behaviour have declined. Students belong to one of four

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houses and are placed in mixed-age 'family groups'. This encourages them to care for each other and to socialise with others of different ages. The houses, named after northern saints, increase opportunities for students to make a positive contribution to the school, local and wider community. The academy has introduced a wide range of strategies to improve attendance but, despite its best efforts, attendance remains low. The proportion of students that are persistent non-attenders has declined significantly. The academy has implemented all the latest guidance on keeping students safe and it promotes their health and well-being very effectively. The academy has satisfactory capacity for further improvement and provides satisfactory value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information from marking and day-to-day assessment when planning work for students
 - providing students of all abilities with tasks which help them to progress well in all lessons
 - increasing opportunities for students to participate in practical or investigative tasks which help them to consolidated their knowledge and understanding
 - ensuring that all teachers implement the academy's policies and guidance so that weaknesses in students' basic skills are identified and eradicated.
- Improve attendance.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students' attainment is improving. The gap between the achievement of students in the academy and their peers in other schools is narrowing. Almost all students left the academy last summer with at least one qualification and went on to employment, education or training. In 2009, the proportion of students that gained five or more A* to G grades was just below the national average and more students gained five or more good grades than in the previous year. This is partly due to the success of measures taken to improve the attainment of this cohort but it also reflects improvements in students' personal development. Students' progress is monitored rigorously and data show that students of all ages and abilities including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making satisfactory and sometimes good progress. The academy expects a great deal of students and this encourages them to expect more of themselves. Most students, including those that work in the 'inclusion room', try hard to improve. They make satisfactory progress in lessons but do not always achieve as well as they could because the tasks they are given are not well enough matched to their needs. Students are not well enough prepared for their future economic well-being.

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They have too few opportunities to evaluate their own work or that of others, work with a partner or as part of a group or apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and improving rapidly. The academy has a strong spiritual ethos which is promoted very successfully through the house system and the 'family' groupings. Students belong to their 'family', they have 'family' time and learn to care for others and support worthwhile charities and events. These activities help them to understand a range of issues and give them a secure grounding from which to assess their own morals and beliefs. Students' cultural development is promoted well. The academy is involved in the Comenius programme promoted by the British Council and there are visits abroad and to places of local and national interest. Students are very aware of their status as the first to benefit from all that the academy offers. They know that they are helping to establish traditions which will endure long after they have left the academy.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Teaching has improved and most lessons are at least satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons carefully but often expect all students to complete the same task. They know that some students will manage this very successfully and that others will find it more difficult and may not complete much of the work. There is an overuse of worksheets and photocopied materials and students spend a great deal of time listening to teachers talk or recording information. Teachers mark books regularly. They praise students' efforts but they do not always provide them with sufficient guidance to help them improve their work or attain the next grade or level. The curriculum has been adapted to meet students' needs. A small number of students participate in a work-based learning programme and there are some successful, additional programmes that help students to improve their literacy skills. There is a wide range of academic and vocational courses but the senior team are aware that there is scope for further improvement. Students represent the academy in sporting events and there is a good range of additional activities and day and residential visits. Enterprise days and saints' weeks provide opportunities to enrich the curriculum. Some of these activities provide students with memorable experiences.

Students are well cared for. All students have a mentor and receive extra support from the chaplain. Students can opt to meet with the counsellor and the academy works effectively with other agencies. The house system ensures that all students are known by staff and feel part of the community. They receive effective social, personal and moral guidance and they know what is expected of them. Students are given the freedom to make choices and decisions. To their credit most choose to do the right thing and those that do not are given well-targeted guidance and support. In most cases this resolves any difficulties. Students are given effective guidance at key points in their development and helpful information is provided for families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and all aspects of the academy's provision are improving. All internal and external data about the academy is analysed rigorously. The academy's judgements about its effectiveness are accurate and the plans made to bring about improvement are robust. The recently appointed directors of student progress provide day-to-day leadership in each house and are responsible for monitoring students' achievement. They produce half-termly summaries for the senior team.

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Although this reporting is at an early stage the summaries are helpful and evaluative. Governors are knowledgeable and experienced. They appreciate the information they receive from the senior team and align this with information from their own evaluations and meetings with staff, students and parents. The new building was completed on time and within budget. The team managed the building project well, and ensured that it did not divert attention away from the key priority of raising attainment. The leadership team have a strong sense of moral purpose. They have tackled discrimination and ensured that all students have equal opportunities to learn and make progress. The academy promotes community cohesion well. It has an accurate view of the needs of its own community and the wider area and ensures that everyone feels fully included. The academy has forged strong partnerships with other academies and schools and with a range of external partners and parents. Leaders and managers are justifiably pleased with all that has been achieved but they recognise that there is still some way to go before their ambitions are fully realised.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents are very pleased with all that the academy provides. They are particularly pleased with the way that the academy cares for and supports their children. They are also pleased with the range of opportunities that are provided. Most parents recognise that behaviour has improved, but a small proportion continues to have concerns. Inspectors agree that behaviour has improved significantly but there are still some occasions when the behaviour of a small number of students is not as good as the

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academy would wish. The academy is tackling this issue successfully. A very small proportion of parents feel that teaching is not yet good enough and that their children do not progress well enough. Inspectors agree that teaching although satisfactory could be improved and have commented on this in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Aidan's Church of England Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 35 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 582 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	9	26	20	57	4	11	1	3
The school keeps my child safe	15	43	18	51	0	0	1	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	17	49	13	37	3	9	1	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	34	16	46	4	11	1	3
The teaching is good at this school	11	31	17	49	4	11	1	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	26	16	46	7	20	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	6	17	21	60	4	11	1	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	9	26	19	54	1	3	1	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	26	22	63	2	6	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	23	18	51	4	11	3	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	20	22	63	2	6	2	6
The school is led and managed effectively	9	26	23	66	0	0	2	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	12	34	19	54	2	6	1	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



29 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Aidan's Church of England Academy, Darlington DL1 1LL

Thank you for being so welcoming when the team of inspectors visited the academy recently. We enjoyed our visit. We think the academy is providing you with a satisfactory education. It cares, guides and supports you well. This is having a very positive impact on other aspects of your development. We were pleased to hear that you think behaviour has improved. We were impressed by your behaviour in lessons and at lunch and break times. We are pleased that far fewer students are excluded from the academy or from lessons.

The academy is working hard to improve your attainment and ensure that you have all the skills you need to lead successful lives. It is succeeding. Most of you are making better progress than in the past and the proportion of students that left the academy with qualifications improved significantly in 2009. There are still a few things that need to improve. Many of you have gaps in your knowledge and understanding or weaknesses in your basic skills. In some lessons teachers plan work which helps every student to learn and make good progress. This is not the case in all lessons because some teachers give all students the same work. It is too difficult for some students and too easy for others. Some of you make mistakes when you are writing. Your teachers do not always identify these mistakes or tell you how to improve. You told us that you like to do practical tasks and work with others so we have asked the principal and other staff to make sure that you have more opportunities to work in this way and to ensure that you are always given work which helps you to make progress.

The academy is doing a great deal to help you to enjoy your education and ensure that you feel part of the 'family' both in your houses and in the academy as a whole. The curriculum, particularly activities before and after school and the good range of visits and visitors, meets your needs and helps you to develop your own interests. Most of you recognise this and are gaining a great deal from your education. There are still a few students that do not attend regularly. This is a pity because if you are not in the academy you cannot benefit from all that it provides and you will not be well enough prepared for your future lives. Please try to ensure that you attend regularly.

We enjoyed meeting you and hearing what you had to say. We felt that you represented

yourselves and the academy very well.

Yours sincerely

Mrs C E Graham

Her Majesty's Inspector

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