

The Blyth Academy

Chase Farm Drive, Blyth, Northumberland NE24 4JP

Inspection dates

3–4 May 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement since the last inspection has not been good enough. By Year 11, outcomes are below average. The progress of current pupils, while improving, remains inconsistent.
- The quality of teaching varies too much within and across subjects. The progress of disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the most able is not improving quickly enough.
- Teaching is not routinely challenging enough. It does not encourage pupils to think deeply about their learning, and work is not sufficiently well matched to the different abilities of pupils.
- A minority of boys do not show the same enthusiasm to learn as girls. This results in some low-level disruption, particularly where teaching lacks challenge and pace.
- Attendance is rising too slowly, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Although the quality of middle leadership is improving, not all middle leaders are equally effective at improving teaching and pupils' achievement in their areas of responsibility.
- Senior leaders and governors have not checked rigorously the impact of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up expenditure.
- The impact of overall support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not checked systematically.
- Outcomes of 16 to 19 A-level courses are not as strong as outcomes of 16 to 19 vocational courses. There is too much variability in the performance of A-level subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The principal and wider leadership team have created a positive learning environment, which makes a strong contribution to pupils' confidence and enjoyment. Expectations of staff and pupils have been raised. The capacity to improve the school is growing.
- The school's work to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. Pupils are well cared for and feel safe.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school site is good. Most pupils are respectful of one another and of adults, and are polite to visitors.
- Many aspects of the sixth form are good. Outcomes of vocational subjects are above average.
- The Northern Education Trust, governors and academy leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good and leads to all pupils achieving well and attaining at least average outcomes, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan and implement activities that are well matched to pupils' needs
 - check regularly on the progress of pupils in lessons, especially of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - have consistently high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning, particularly of boys, and insist that all pupils respond to oral and written feedback where it is designed to improve their work
 - consistently challenge the most able pupils.
- Strengthen the impact of leadership and management on pupils' outcomes, by:
 - making sure that additional funding to support the progress of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those who join the school in Year 7 with low starting points, is well targeted and used to good effect
 - continuing to develop the skills and expertise of middle leaders so that all are successful in securing good teaching and pupils' good progress in their areas of responsibility
 - ensuring more rigorous and systematic checking of the provision made to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average, by building on recently introduced strategies aimed at reducing absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve 16 to 19 A-level outcomes so that they represent at least overall good progress, by:
 - ensuring that all students study courses appropriate to their abilities
 - reducing further the variability in teaching across A-level subjects.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Previously, leaders and governors have not taken effective action to improve teaching so that it is good, and to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress across Years 7 to 11. As a result, too many pupils who left the school in Year 11 since the previous inspection have underachieved.
- Important changes have taken place under the leadership of the current principal and the recently restructured governing body, but these have not been in place long enough to have had a sustained impact.
- Leaders have reacted energetically to poor GCSE results in 2016. The newly appointed principal, supported by an able leadership team and increasingly astute governance, has acted swiftly to address some weak teaching across the school. Many parents, pupils and staff recognised in their responses to the Ofsted online questionnaires the positive changes in the running of the school.
- The principal has restructured the leadership team and secured good-quality additional support from the Northern Education Trust, the school's achievement partner, and other specialist practitioners. Leaders' roles and responsibilities, at all levels, are now well defined and understood. The impact of these leaders is quickly becoming evident through the pace at which improvements are being implemented and taking effect. This demonstrates that the current leaders have the necessary skills and abilities to bring about the further improvements required.
- Senior leaders know the school well. They are clear about the areas of the school's work that require improvement, and show a sense of urgency in their work. They have taken prompt action to address shortcomings in teaching and learning. They have also introduced measures to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments, including cross-moderation with other schools and organisations.
- The new leadership team has established a strong culture of developing the skills of teachers and staff. Systems for managing the performance of staff are well organised. These systems ensure that all teachers are held to account for developing the quality of their teaching, and for making sure that the pupils they teach make good progress.
- In addition, teachers benefit from opportunities to contribute to the development of new teaching practice by working collaboratively with other colleagues. Although these measures have not yet secured enough good teaching or pupils' good progress in all areas, there is clear evidence that teaching is improving.
- Leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching. Additional support is given to those teachers who do not meet leaders' expectations. Staff at the school appreciate the support they receive for their professional development. Newly qualified teachers also value the support they receive.
- Middle leaders are beginning to play increasingly prominent roles in helping to move the school forward. However, not all are sufficiently confident to ensure that the systematic checks they make on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching in their teams bring about the necessary rapid improvements.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils access an appropriate range of courses, academic and vocational, to meet their needs and aspirations. In addition, pupils benefit from an array of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities in sports, performing arts and various pastimes that enable them to develop their skills, talents and interests. A small number of pupils are provided with bespoke, off-site provision that meets their individual needs.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and understanding of life in modern Britain is successfully promoted through the study of religious education, personal, social and health education, and the assembly programme. Pupils, particularly at key stage 3, value the range of trips they have had to promote their cultural development. These opportunities and experiences ensure a suitable focus on tackling discrimination and promoting tolerant attitudes, as well as appreciating the importance of rules and the freedom of speech.
- Arrangements to check the impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, as well as those who enter the school with below-average attainment, are not rigorous enough. As a consequence, leaders and governors are unclear which funded actions are making a difference, and whether overall gains are sufficient.
- The support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not checked systematically to ensure that they make good progress.
- Leaders' strong focus on the care and support of all pupils influences positively the values and the climate of the school. Good relationships exist between most pupils and staff at all levels.
- Careers guidance is proving effective for pupils in key stage 4. Pupils spoke positively about the support received during their options process. A range of visitors from universities and the world of work regularly promote opportunities in education, employment and training.

Governance of the school

- In the past, governors have not acted quickly or robustly enough to tackle the weaknesses that have resulted in the school's poor performance in examination results.
- Since the last inspection, the trust board has recruited effectively and brought in additional capacity at local governing body level with the relevant skills and knowledge to help secure faster improvement.
- Present governance has a very good understanding of the strengths of the school, and the priorities to move it forward at pace. Governors are ambitious for all pupils and families, and are determined to improve rapidly the outcomes for all pupils.
- Governors are confident in holding school leaders and managers to account, and achieve an appropriate balance of challenge and support.
- Governors check the school's website to ensure that it contains the information required and provides good access to useful information for parents.
- Governors place a high priority on keeping pupils safe, and ensure that staff training is up to date and relevant.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders follow the school's safeguarding procedures carefully. When concerns are raised, they liaise closely with the relevant external organisations.
- Leaders and governors are committed to the safety and well-being of all. Employment checks made on staff, volunteers and governors are robust and well recorded. Safeguarding records are detailed, well organised and stored securely.
- Senior leaders and governors regularly undertake audits for safeguarding to ensure that the school's practice is of a high quality. Regular training ensures that all staff have a strong understanding of the importance of safeguarding.
- Leaders ensure a safe environment for pupils through regular and detailed risk assessments. The school site is secure and staff are vigilant in keeping pupils safe. Staff understand thoroughly the implications of the latest version of 'Keeping children safe in education', including their responsibility to prevent extremism and radicalisation.
- Pupils, parents and staff overwhelmingly indicate that school is a safe place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is variable. Some teaching fails to match work well to the level of pupils' ability and needs. Consequently some pupils lose interest and do not make the progress of which they are capable. Where there is inconsistency, the new leadership team is acting decisively to address this.
- Some teachers do not take pupils' prior knowledge, understanding, skills or abilities into sufficient account. This can result in the most able pupils not being stretched and challenged enough.
- This situation is sometimes compounded when teachers do not check carefully how well pupils are learning in lessons. Consequently, pupils' misconceptions persist or their understanding is not secured. This is particularly the case for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This also results in some pupils not being moved on to more demanding work when they are ready. As a result, they do not then make the progress of which they are capable.
- Assessment is being supported by the increasing use of external moderation and verification. However, the school's own systems for tracking and the use of data are not yet fully understood by all teachers and therefore are not being used consistently to inform teaching.
- Some teachers use questioning skilfully to explore and extend pupils' understanding, getting them to think more deeply about their learning. However, in other instances, teachers accept limited, superficial responses and do not challenge pupils further.
- Most teachers have good subject knowledge. However, expectations about presentation in pupils' books are inconsistent. When poorly presented work is accepted, pupils' readiness to make a greater effort begins to slip. Teachers' expectations of pupils' responses to the oral and written feedback that they receive, in order to

improve their work, are inconsistent. As a result, opportunities are missed for many pupils to deepen their thinking and improve the work that they initially produce.

- Leaders are ensuring that the very good practice that exists in some teaching in the school is now being shared with colleagues to encourage more rapid improvement in teaching overall.
- Good relationships exist between most teachers and pupils. This fosters generally positive attitudes to learning and encourages many pupils to try their best and often pupils engage keenly with tasks and activities. However, in lessons that do not sufficiently challenge and stimulate pupils, especially boys, low-level disruption occurs and hinders pupils' progress.
- There is a growing focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in subjects outside English and mathematics. Teachers increasingly check and correct pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar and provide opportunities for pupils to practise key calculation skills. Many teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to read aloud, check their understanding, and help them to pronounce correctly specialist words and terminology. As a consequence, most pupils are confident and fluent readers.
- Teachers promote equality of opportunity through their teaching, and most classrooms are inclusive environments that support learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Some pupils have not reached a level of personal development where they take responsibility for their own learning, nor do they reflect on the impact of their attitudes on the learning of others, as well as on themselves. This is more prevalent with boys.
- Pupils benefit from effective careers information, advice and guidance. Pupils feel well supported during the options process, and there is an extensive range of well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn about careers and life beyond the school.
- The school's effective work with vulnerable pupils, including its use of alternative provision, has significantly reduced the number of pupils at risk of not being in education, training or employment. Pupils who attend alternative provision are well supported to make good progress on the courses they are studying. Leaders are vigilant in monitoring pupils' attendance and behaviour when attending alternative provision.
- The school's work on educating pupils on how to stay safe is also effective. Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying and indicate that the school's systems are supportive. School leaders track and monitor incidents carefully. School records show that incidents of bullying are increasingly rare, and this was confirmed in inspectors' discussions with pupils.
- Pupils feel safe in the school and know how to keep themselves safe. They are confident in their use of technology and social media. The culture of the school is one

where staff report any issues quickly and these issues are taken seriously. The school has an increasingly strong sense of community.

- Pupils' personal development is enhanced by a good programme of extra-curricular activities, educational visits and visitors to school. Pupils are particularly appreciative of the wide range of sporting activities on offer and speak enthusiastically about how much they benefit and learn from those opportunities.
- The school site is well kept. It is secure and well supervised. Pupils respect the learning environment which is free from graffiti and litter.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- When learning activities require pupils to work on their own or in groups, boys in particular become chatty and lose focus. When teaching lacks challenge and expectation, the poor attitude of some boys remains unchallenged.
- Low-level disruption in lessons too often prevents pupils from making the progress they should. Pupils say that behaviour is improving, but varies depending on the teacher.
- In many classes, pupils' behaviour is more positive because teaching ensures that they are interested and challenged by their work, and able to concentrate more effectively.
- The use of derogatory language is rare in lessons and around the school. At breaktime, pupils are generally respectful to staff and to their peers.
- Movement between lessons is purposeful. Most pupils arrive punctually to lessons and are well equipped for learning.
- Uniform standards are high. Pupils look smart and are polite and friendly.
- Although attendance has risen since the previous inspection, it remains below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent is above average, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff are applying new strategies to reduce poor attendance, but their impact so far has been limited.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions and the proportion of pupils removed from lessons has fallen significantly since the previous inspection. Pupils agree that behaviour has improved significantly since the previous inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils arrive at the school with skills below that of other pupils nationally. Although outcomes for Year 11 in 2016 rose, pupils did not achieve as well as they should across most subjects, including in English and mathematics. The proportion of pupils gaining a grade C or higher in English and mathematics was well below the national average, and especially so for pupils with middle-ability starting points.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils across almost all subjects was much lower than that of similar groups of pupils nationally. Leaders have not ensured that funding

to support these pupils has been used effectively.

- In Year 11 in 2016, the most able pupils made too little progress from their starting points. This was the case overall and particularly in English, mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages. Too few pupils achieved the highest grades. The most able disadvantaged pupils also did not achieve as well as their peers nationally.
- Pupils who had special educational needs and/or disabilities in Year 11 in 2016 made insufficient progress. They did not receive sufficiently targeted support.
- The robust actions leaders have taken since September 2016 to secure better outcomes for pupils and improvements in the quality of teaching are accelerating the progress of pupils currently in the school. Achievement in mathematics and English is gathering momentum. The mathematics curriculum now has a stronger focus on helping pupils to secure their understanding of key mathematical concepts. Targeted teaching for specific groups of pupils is helping pupils to address the deficits in their linguistic skills and knowledge.
- The inspection team looked carefully at the school's current prediction of outcomes for 2017 and beyond. These show that pupils are now making better progress than has been the case up to and including 2016. There is evidence that the quality of pupils' work matches the school's and subject leaders' evaluations of their current progress. While there continue to be some variations in the quality of teaching and its impact on progress, current pupils are making gains in their subject knowledge, skills and understanding. This includes younger pupils whose progress is now being prioritised by the school.
- School data and inspection evidence, including the quality of work seen in pupils' books, shows that, across the school, current pupils are now making better progress and standards are on the up. Improvement is evident in the performance of groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able. Despite this, pupils' achievement still requires further improvement. This is especially so for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Variations in the quality of provision for these pupils, and in overall teaching across most subjects, continue to hinder some pupils' progress.
- The small number of pupils who attend courses away from the school site benefit from provision that is matched to their needs. Most are successful in securing a range of qualifications.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Changes to the leadership of the sixth form have brought about significant improvements since the previous inspection. Sixth-form students indicate how well they are supported by tutors and teachers, and how better prepared they now feel for Year 12 work and their future lives beyond school.
- Students make good progress in vocational subjects and achieve above average outcomes because of consistently good teaching. However, teaching is more variable in A-level subjects and Year 13 outcomes do not represent good achievement in all subjects. In the past, not all students have followed courses suitably matched to their

interests and aptitudes. Leaders have analysed the causes for A-level underperformance, and have moved rapidly to ensure that improvements are made.

- Students are given a comprehensive package of support to guide them through their programmes of study. Students' progress is closely monitored and staff intervene to mentor them should they fall behind. The principal and sixth-form leaders are committed to ensuring that every student completes their studies and none are left to fail or drop out.
- Those students who are retaking their English and mathematics GCSEs alongside their A levels make strong progress. Their success rates are substantially better than the national average because of the focused teaching that they receive.
- Students' personal development is good. They are mature and confident and have positive attitudes to learning. Students' relationships with teachers and other staff are strong.
- Students benefit from a broad range of enrichment opportunities, including working with younger pupils in school, supporting the teaching in a range of key stage 3 and 4 subjects, and undertaking Duke of Edinburgh qualifications and sports leadership awards. All students undertake work experience in Year 12. These opportunities enhance their personal qualities and general learning skills. As a result, students are well prepared for university or employment, and talk knowledgeably about their future plans.
- There is a good transition programme in place for Year 11 pupils who join the sixth form. As a result, students in Year 12 make a strong and confident start to their studies. Sixth-form leaders identify the most able students before they join the sixth form and ensure that there is a programme of opportunities to stimulate them. An increasing proportion of students go to Russell Group and prestigious universities.

School details

Unique reference number	140002
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10032000

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	788
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Hall
Headteacher	Sarah Ramsden
Telephone number	01670 798 100
Website	www.theblythacademy.org
Email address	admin@theblythacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	19–20 May 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is

above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. A similar proportion of pupils have an education, health and care plan as seen nationally.
- The school is part of the Northern Education Trust.
- The school uses largely three alternative providers for a small number of pupils: Choysez, Engage and The Quay.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been widespread changes in staffing, including the appointment of a new principal, and new senior and middle leaders. The governing body's committees have been restructured and new governors have taken up roles.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a wide range of lessons across the school, looking extensively at pupils' work in all lessons. Two visits to lessons were made with senior leaders.
- Alongside senior leaders, inspectors reviewed pupils' progress data and pupils' work in books, information about the performance of teachers, documents pertaining to safety and behaviour, and information pertaining to safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons, at breaktimes, and met with groups of pupils separately.
- Meetings were held with the principal, senior and middle leaders, and governors. A discussion was also held with the school's achievement partner and with the director of secondary academies from the Northern Education Trust.
- Inspectors took account of the 25 replies from pupils, the 20 replies from staff, and the 15 replies from parents to Ofsted's questionnaires. Inspectors also considered a variety of recent school surveys of the views of parents, pupils and staff of the work of the school.

Inspection team

Andy Swallow, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Gammack	Ofsted Inspector
Geoffrey Lumsdon	Ofsted Inspector
Joanne Owens	Ofsted Inspector

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