

Woodham Academy

Washington Crescent, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 4AX

Inspection dates

8–9 March 2016

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

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected as an academy

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement. Many pupils, over a number of years, have not made enough progress in mathematics. Current pupils' progress is not improving swiftly enough.
- Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school are not closing rapidly enough, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Teachers do not always plan work that is at the right level of difficulty.
- Some teachers do not check sufficiently well on pupils' understanding during lessons to know when to move on to new learning.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are inconsistent. Low-level disruption in some lessons slows pupils' learning.
- Too many pupils lack self-discipline or pride in their work. Not all teachers insist that pupils' work is of a high enough standard.
- Leadership and management are improving teaching and learning, but not fast enough. There is too much variability within, and across, subjects.
- Leaders' views of the quality of teaching are overly generous and do not take enough account of its impact on pupils' learning and progress.
- Governors have not challenged leaders sufficiently to bring about rapid improvement of pupils' achievement. They have not ensured that additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils has helped them achieve well.

The school has the following strengths

- Good-quality teaching, learning and assessment in English are well established. Almost all pupils make good progress in English from their starting points.
- The Sports Academy programme is having a strong impact on the attendance, behaviour and achievement of those who choose to participate.
- Pupils feel safe; they are appropriately supervised around the school site and well cared for by staff.
- The wide range of visits, competitions, extra-curricular clubs and resources to support pupils' learning are much enjoyed. They contribute well to pupils' social, cultural and personal development.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in mathematics, so that it is consistently good and enables all groups of pupils to achieve well by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan work that closely matches all pupils' varying needs and abilities, including the disadvantaged and most able, and challenges them to do better
 - teachers improve assessment within lessons to skilfully question and check pupils' learning in order to deepen their understanding and so that they know when to move on to new learning
 - pupils' work and discussions in lessons are assessed regularly to ensure that pupils are all contributing well to their learning.

- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that all teachers, including temporary staff, have the highest expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning, and implement the behaviour policy consistently
 - developing and drawing upon the best practice in some aspects of the school's work to ensure that pupils' pride in their work, self-discipline and confidence are more securely and consistently developed.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and governance by ensuring that:
 - all leaders, including subject leaders, check the quality of teaching rigorously, focus sharply on pupils' learning and progress, and use good practice strategically to eliminate variability within and across subjects
 - the pupil premium funding is used effectively to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils so that the attainment and progress gaps of these pupils, when compared to their classmates and other pupils nationally, close quickly
 - governors provide robust challenge to the headteacher and senior leaders for the progress of different groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, and ensure that actions secure swift improvement in mathematics.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium 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

- The headteacher and governors have worked hard to establish the academy following the closure of the previous Woodham school but they have been slow to tackle and secure improvements in mathematics to match the strong progress that pupils have consistently made in English.
- The evaluation of the school's performance, and especially of teaching, is more generous than the current learning and progress outcomes indicate. Leaders undertake sampling of pupils' books and carry out checks in classrooms, but the judgements they make about the quality of teaching do not take sufficient account of the progress pupils make over time.
- Leaders know that further improvements are needed to improve the attainment and progress of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, if they are to secure their aim of 'good progress and achievement for all'.
- Actions are being taken to support some disadvantaged pupils in improving attendance and reading levels and there are signs of improvement for a small number of pupils who benefit from this support. Responsibility for their achievement is dispersed across teachers, subject leaders and pastoral leaders. However, the impact of the work of this large group of leaders has yet to be realised. Gaps in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils are not closing rapidly across all year groups.
- New appointments are helping to strengthen middle leadership, particularly in science, mathematics, design and technology, and humanities. Individually, they show much promise, but overall leaders have yet to fully address the variation in teaching within and across subjects that inspection evidence revealed and pupil performance measures demonstrate.
- New leaders and staff are appreciative of the support and training provided to them. Several staff are involved in national programmes to develop their teaching and leadership further and are beginning to apply effective strategies in their lessons. Systems to manage the performance of teachers and middle and senior leaders are in place. The school is using them appropriately to hold staff to account, and some weaker staff have been replaced.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is appropriately supported through a curriculum that is both broad and balanced. Explicit teaching of 'British values' is helping to develop pupils' knowledge of such principles as the rule of law and tolerance of those who are different from themselves. Careers guidance and support for their personal, social and health education are helping pupils to make choices about their future. School plans recognise a need to further strengthen pupils' numeracy and literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Appropriate attention to pupils' academic and physical development is combined in the 'Sports Academy'. Leaders' introduction of this initiative is helping to raise the aspirations of boys and increase their engagement in learning. Over a third of pupils participate in the extra-curricular sports activities and enjoy this aspect of school life immensely.
- Leaders have continued to secure the positive support of most parents and pupils and they provide extensive briefings and updates to include them as partners in their children's learning. However, a small number of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are concerned about levels of misbehaviour, the number of staff leaving and the impact on their children's learning.
- Staff and governors fully support and share the headteacher's vision for the school and determination to move the school forward and improve outcomes for pupils.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are earnest and committed to their role, and the link governor programme is developing. Governors have a general understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school but have not held leaders to account fully for the lack of pace in developing mathematics.
 - Governors are not yet secure in interrogating information and data around progress to strategically drive improvement. Records of their work show little evidence of challenge. Governors have not deeply questioned the impact of actions on the behaviour and progress of specific groups of pupils such as those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs.
 - Governors are assured by the new appointments and better results following the low point in 2014. The positive tone of communications they receive from the headteacher, that practice is improving and the school is moving in the right direction, also tells them that the school is back on an even keel.
 - Governors keep a close watch on finances and the school's management procedures, such as ensuring that performance management of teachers takes place correctly.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders take their responsibilities seriously and ensure that training is up to date so that staff are able to act quickly to address any safeguarding issues that may arise. Systems for keeping children safe are effective and pupils are well supervised. Comprehensive records are kept, and liaison with external agencies helps to ensure pupils receive appropriate support when it is needed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Even with a core of good teaching, overall too much teaching is less than effective and does not provide enough stimulus or challenge. Disruptions to learning are not always challenged by teachers, and high expectations of behaviour and learning are not sufficiently emphasised.
- Often teachers provide good explanations of mathematical concepts. However, scrutiny of pupils' books and discussions with them about their learning show that pupils are given insufficient time to practise and consolidate skills before moving on. Consequently, pupils' confidence in mathematics is not as strong, and their knowledge and skills over time are not as secure, as they could be.
- Revisions to the mathematics curriculum have yet to be fully embedded. Work in Year 7 lacks challenge, and pupils often repeat work done in previous key stages rather than move on. By Years 8 and 9, work is more challenging.
- Assessment within lessons requires improvement. In mathematics, science, art and French, learning is often not pitched as well as it could be to enable pupils to make good progress. Activities undertaken in lessons are too easy for some pupils. Consequently, they mark time waiting for others to catch up or undertake more work of the same level. At other times, teachers move on to the next task without checking if pupils can do what has been introduced, with the result that pupils quickly lose interest and behaviour deteriorates.
- In some lessons, behaviour is managed well from the outset. This was seen as pupils lined up outside classrooms, entered quietly and were quickly engaged in tasks that captured their interest and were well explained. Well-structured activities and tasks, together with good management of pupils' behaviour, are stronger features of teaching. However, with the exception of English and physical education, they are not consistently positive features across subjects.
- In general, the teaching of general communication and mathematical skills across many subjects is variable. For example, pupils' books often showed only limited written responses. Homework tasks provided further opportunity for extended writing in all subjects.
- The school's systems for marking and feedback to pupils are used consistently. However, evidence of their impact and of pupils acting on the feedback is inconsistent.
- An emphasis on high-quality writing and reading is a strength of the teaching in English. Opportunities to discuss, write extensively and explore the subject in depth and detail make a good contribution to pupils' learning. Pupils are highly engaged and look forward to interesting and challenging work in these lessons and they invariably try hard and want to succeed. Many pupils produce homework of good quality and spend time in crafting and organising their writing.
- Highly positive relationships between staff and pupils foster high levels of motivation and engagement in physical education and sports activities. Lessons are planned effectively to enable pupils to make rapid progress in their learning and to practise and refine skills to a high level. Bespoke advice and guidance supported pupils in making gains in their understanding and knowledge of techniques.
- The school makes revision material available in a variety of forms, including social media. Key Stage 4 pupils find this easy to use and very helpful.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Good attitudes to learning are not established. A lack of enthusiasm for learning and self-discipline was demonstrated in some lessons in mathematics, art, science and languages. Some pupils are able to quietly disengage when lessons do not sufficiently grab their attention, and their lack of contribution, low productivity and occasional untidy work is not always challenged by teachers. Consequently, pupils' progress slows.

- In contrast, pupils are developing confidence in English and physical education. Pupils explained that this is because 'teachers go out of their way to make learning interesting', saying that their teachers set them challenging work and they are proud of what they achieve.
- Most pupils are welcoming to visitors and are polite. Movement around the school is calm at the change of lessons and at break and lunchtimes. Typically, pupils are punctual to lessons and arrive with the required equipment, but some are slow to settle to work.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and they know who to go to if they have concerns. They know how to keep themselves safe because they understand the dangers posed by extremist thinking, those who would exploit children and misuse of social media. Opportunities to explore a variety of issues are provided in tutorial sessions, some classes and assemblies.
- Appropriate systems are in place for the school to check on the welfare, safety and behaviour of pupils who attend alternative provision.
- Bullying is infrequent. However, some pupils reported that bullying is not always dealt with effectively. This view was also reflected by a few parents who responded during the inspection on Parent View.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because attitudes to learning vary too much depending on the quality of teaching pupils receive.
- Behaviour in lessons is sometimes disruptive. Occasionally, pupils demonstrate a lack of respect for each other and staff by not paying attention, talking when the teacher is talking and shouting out. Some pupils ignore requests to moderate their conduct both in lessons and around school. Senior leaders also recognise inconsistency in the application of behaviour policies by some staff.
- Attendance is improving and moving closer to the national average as a result of hard work over time by leaders to reduce absence rates. A wider range of strategies, such as the Sports Academy and sharply focused multi-agency work, are helping to encourage more regular attendance. A high level of persistent non-attendance is damaging some disadvantaged pupils' achievement.
- The school is managing the behaviour of some challenging pupils better since September 2015. In partnership with other schools, pupils 'at risk' of exclusion undertake respite or a fresh start at another school. As a result, the number of exclusions is falling, although it still remains relatively high.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- There has been a trend of weaker progress in mathematics since the academy opened, compared to pupils' progress in English. This is due to poor teaching. The school is taking steps to tackle this and improvement was noted in the 2015 results, which edged closer to the national average. However, current assessment information does not show a consistent trend of swift improvement across the school. Many pupils in Key Stage 3 and Year 11 are making slow progress to achieve their targets. Additional lessons and compulsory after-school attendance at exam booster sessions have yet to combat historic weaknesses in mathematics teaching for exam groups.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not always reach the levels of attainment that they are capable of. From their starting points, their progress in mathematics is consistently below their classmates and was well below other pupils nationally in 2014 and 2015. Exceptionally wide gaps are closing over time, in both English and mathematics. This is due to the additional support that some disadvantaged pupils receive in the Sports Academy and through additional support for improving their attendance and behaviour.
- Across most year groups, current disadvantaged pupils make less progress than others who entered the school with the same starting points.
- Over the last two years, pupils who have special educational needs or disability made significantly less progress than their peers. By the time they leave Woodham in Year 11, pupils make much less progress than pupils nationally. Currently, pupils who have special educational needs or disability are well cared for and their progress is improving, more quickly for some individuals, and particularly so for pupils in Year 7. This is due to good, focused additional support coordinated through the school's Learning Centre.
- Most pupils who spend time in off-site alternative provision are not making the progress that is expected of them. However, the school is succeeding in keeping them engaged in education through extensive support and the involvement of a range of external agencies.
- Pupils enter Woodham with prior attainment that is broadly typical for their age and they leave the school

with attainment that is mostly in line with pupils nationally in the majority of subjects. This amounts to progress that requires improvement. Pupils achieve well, however, and make good progress in English, general studies, physical education and sports. Attainment improved last year following a significant dip in performance in 2014.

- Over 70% of pupils study a broad range of subjects known as the English Baccalaureate, and over 30% achieved this in 2015, an improvement on the previous year. The school predicts a similar proportion will do so in 2016. Opportunities for pupils to develop and apply numeracy skills and written and verbal responses are less evident across the curriculum and are holding back their progress.
- Many pupils enjoy and consistently achieve well in English. Discussions with pupils about their learning, together with scrutiny of their work during this inspection, confirm that good standards of work and enthusiasm have been maintained. Most pupils read widely and are encouraged to do so. Many pupils receiving additional support have made accelerated progress in reading.
- The most-able pupils make the progress expected of them. They enjoy the challenge of the work and interesting topics in English. This is not always the case, and work in some subjects is too easy. Leaders have laid positive foundations for them to succeed further by introducing 'The More Able Academy' in September 2015.

School details

Unique reference number	138717
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10002990

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	746
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sean Barnett
Headteacher	Christine Forsyth
Telephone number	01325 300328
Website	www.woodham.org.uk
Email address	christine.forsyth@woodham.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

Information about this school

- The academy opened in September 2012 and converted from Woodham Community Technology College. The school occupies the same buildings and has retained the same headteacher. Although technically designated as 11–18, the school operates as an 11–16 school and does not have a sixth form.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above the national average. The proportion who have a statement of special educational need or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- Eleven pupils in Key Stage 4 attend alternative provision for all or some of the week. These pupils are undertaking courses or work-related training with eight different registered providers including a local care home, a garage and nursery, and nearby premier league football clubs.
- Over a third of pupils participate in the Woodham Sports Academy coaching programme. The Sports Academy is part of the school campus.
- Since September 2015, the school does not enter pupils early for examinations.
- The school meets the government's current floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.

Information about this inspection

- Discussions were held with the headteacher, members of the senior team, middle leaders, teachers, including those who had recently joined the school, and members of the governing body. Inspectors also spoke by telephone with the Chair of Governors and a member of the local authority who provides external educational support to the school.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documentation including information and data about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance. They viewed documents used by leaders to check the school's work, including the monitoring of teaching and performance management, school development planning and self-evaluation, minutes of governors' meetings and external reports from partners providing challenge. During the inspection, detailed consideration was given to policies and practices relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed learning in a wide range of lessons across all year groups, including observations with senior leaders. During these observations, inspectors looked at pupils' work and talked to them about it.
- Inspectors formally interviewed a large number of pupils, and spoke to a range of pupils informally at break and lunchtime. Inspectors also observed pupils' conduct and behaviour throughout the day in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors took account of the 20 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as data from the school's own parental survey conducted during 2014/15. The views of 60 staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire were also taken into account.

Inspection team

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