

Darlington School of Mathematics and Science

Eggleston View, Darlington, County Durham DL3 9SH

Inspection dates

11–12 November 2015

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an academy that requires improvement

- The progress made by all pupils is uneven, particularly disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and the most-able.
- Pupils make less progress in mathematics than in English because of the inconsistent quality of teaching and a lack of challenge in some mathematics lessons.
- Overall, teaching is not always challenging enough to promote good outcomes for pupils, especially the most-able.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are variable, especially in lessons where they are not sufficiently stretched. This results in off-task chatter and inattentiveness.
- The quality of work in the mixed-aged tutorials is variable. It does not prepare all pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- The analysis and use of pupils' progress information are not sharp and do not yet lead to good progress for all.
- Too many pupils are entered inappropriately for early examinations. This has adversely affected their outcomes over time.
- Some pupils do not have access to the full range of subjects on offer at Key Stage 4. This does not support their good progress.
- The academy's marking policy is not followed consistently and effectively by all staff.
- The quality of work undertaken by some senior and middle leaders is mixed. Not all are effective at checking the quality of provision and the outcomes reached by all groups of pupils.
- Parents have mixed views of the academy's work. They do not always fully understand the changes that are being made to improve the quality of teaching and their children's outcomes.

The academy has the following strengths

- The newly appointed interim and executive headteachers have high aspirations. They are relentless in the pursuit of better teaching and outcomes for all groups of pupils.
- A number of senior and middle leaders fully support the recent changes to increase expectations of all colleagues' work across the academy.
- Pupils feel safe in the academy. They conduct themselves well, particularly outside lessons. Many are ready to learn and want to do well.
- The advice given to pupils about the next steps in their education is effective.
- The range of visits and extra-curricular activities enhances pupils' personal development.

Full report

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching to be at least good so that all groups of pupils achieve to the best of their ability by ensuring that:
 - work set is appropriately challenging for all pupils, in particular those with special educational needs and the most-able
 - all staff have high expectations of what different groups of pupils can achieve
 - pupils are motivated by their lessons and their attitudes to learning are always positive.
- Improve the rates of pupils' overall progress, especially in mathematics, by:
 - sharpening the analysis and use of assessment information in the academy's evaluation of its own performance, and in teachers' planning for pupils' daily learning
 - encouraging pupils to reason and justify their responses to mathematical calculations and concepts
 - providing regular opportunities for pupils to test their developing mathematical skills in real-life scenarios and problems.
- Improve the personal development of all pupils by ensuring that the weekly tutorial programme is delivered equally well by all tutors, so that all pupils are well prepared for their future lives in modern Britain.
- Improve the overall quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring the consistent and effective application of the academy's marking policy
 - ensuring all senior and middle leaders gain confidence in challenging the underperformance of pupils and any aspects of weak teaching in their departments
 - delivering a more broad and balanced curriculum by offering a full range of subjects to pupils
 - communicating clearly with all parents about the benefits that changes to the academy's work will bring for the education of their children.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the work of the academy has not improved sufficiently. The quality of teaching has fallen and pupils' outcomes have not increased enough in some subjects. Senior leaders have not been robust in checking the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, and have not been held to account with sufficient rigour by governors or members of the Longfield Academy Trust board.
- The recently appointed interim and executive headteachers exude high aspirations for all pupils. In only a matter of weeks, they have begun to tackle the weak teaching that has increased since the previous inspection, introduced robust performance management arrangements, and implemented more rigorous procedures to check the progress and achievement of different groups of pupils in all years.
- All of these changes were urgently required but have not yet had time to become embedded and to yield full impact.
- A number of senior and middle leaders show equally high expectations and fully support the measures taken to date to halt the academy's decline.
- Not all senior and middle leaders are yet confident or competent in identifying and addressing shortfalls in the quality of teaching or judging the rates of progress in all subjects, by all groups of pupils.
- More work is still to be done by some middle leaders in establishing the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' learning and progress in many subjects so that underachievement can be identified and addressed much sooner.
- Heads of department do not ensure that all teachers follow consistently and effectively the academy's marking policy.
- Not all disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, or the most-able, make sufficient progress. As such, the academy's work to ensure that all pupils have an equal opportunity to do well requires improvement.
- Staff and pupils work together to promote strong relationships and to prevent any form of direct or indirect discriminatory behaviour. Prejudiced behaviour is not tolerated. These actions underpin the academy's positive environment.
- Leaders and managers know that the curriculum does not fully meet pupils' needs. They have already put into place plans to reintroduce religious education for all Year 10 and 11 pupils, and to maximise pupils' GCSE subject choices. These changes will not take immediate effect and, as such, the present curriculum is insufficiently broad and balanced.
- Too many pupils have been entered early, and inappropriately, for GCSE examinations since the previous inspection. These arrangements have curtailed a few pupils' outcomes. This is particularly so in mathematics, where a few pupils have been unable to improve on their first, and only, examination result. New leaders have taken the recent decision to end this practice.
- The personal, social and health education programme is adequately planned. Where it is delivered well by tutors, it contributes appropriately to pupils' physical, emotional and personal well-being.
- However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of the weekly tutorials. As such, not all pupils develop a good understanding of the importance of equality and diversity, and of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. They are not all well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- A range of extra-curricular activities and visits appropriately supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These opportunities include pupils' participation in sport, musical ensembles and concerts, and visits abroad as well as to theatres, museums and local places of interest. In providing all of these experiences, the academy emphasises the importance of good relations and community spirit.
- The recently improved arrangements for the management of teachers' performance are thorough. All teachers now have robust targets to improve pupils' achievement, and are held increasingly to account for doing so.
- Parents have mixed views of the work of the academy. Most are supportive of the new changes and the positive impact on their children's experiences. However, some do not fully understand the reasons behind the major changes since the start of the academic year. Inspectors find that communication between the academy's leaders and families could be more timely and clear.

- The Longfield Academy Trust has not been rigorous enough in holding the academy's leaders to account. The trust has recently stepped up procedures for checking the academy's work. Effective use is now being made of good and outstanding local schools, and relevant consultants' work has been commissioned to support the academy's drive for improvement.
- **The governance of the academy**
 - Governors have not challenged senior leaders sufficiently in the past. They have accepted too readily unreliable information about the academy's effectiveness.
 - The new Chair of the Governing Body has responded positively to the academy's recent external review of governance, and commissioned appropriate training to help governors understand the present quality of teaching, its impact on pupils' progress, and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.
 - As a result, minutes of committee meetings indicate that governors are increasingly confident to ask probing questions of leaders and understand external reports about the academy's performance.
 - Governors discuss carefully major spending decisions, in particular the allocation of pupil premium and Year 7 'catch-up' funding. They have authorised additional staffing and resources to support pupils' development of literacy and numeracy skills in small groups. Governors are increasingly aware of the impact that these measures have on pupils' achievement.
 - Governors have put in place appropriate processes to review the performance of the new interim headteacher. Systems are also in place to ensure they receive information about the performance targets set for teachers and the link with salary progression.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Senior leaders identify quickly any pupils at risk of harm. They engage well with a range of partners to respond as necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are not high enough in many lessons. Too often the same activities are set for all pupils to complete, regardless of their abilities. This restricts the progress of the most-able, who do not always have enough challenge because the work is too easy for them.
- Similarly, some pupils in lessons need longer amounts of time to be able to secure their understanding. Not enough teachers check carefully enough their pupils' learning in lessons, especially those pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. Not enough teachers are confident to adjust their teaching to suit pupils' differing needs. As a result their progress is uneven.
- About one third of parents who responded to the online Ofsted survey, Parent View, had concerns about the quality of teaching in the academy.
- Inspectors saw examples of well-planned and organised lessons where teachers challenged pupils successfully and questioned them well to test their knowledge and understanding. Motivating activities and real-life scenarios were used effectively to capture and retain pupils' interest, and to encourage them to persevere and think for themselves. These positive aspects enable them to make rapid progress. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, pupils rose to the challenges of identifying the themes of good and evil in the 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', inspired by the teacher's questioning and use of visual prompts. Similarly, Year 9 pupils concentrated well, independently of the teacher, to find out about the causes and effects of a volcanic eruption. They were inspired by the teacher's passion for geography and excellent subject knowledge.
- The teaching of English is improving and is largely good. The teaching of mathematics is of more variable quality, with a lack of challenge in some lessons. At times, lessons do not always give all pupils enough time to work out for themselves the rationale behind certain calculations and to justify their answers. In books, there are few examples of pupils using new-found mathematical knowledge to solve problems. Consequently, pupils' progress in this subject is not as strong as their progress in English.
- Reading and general communication skills are promoted effectively in a number of subjects. Where younger pupils arrive at the academy with weaknesses in these areas, additional help is provided for them. Evidence provided by senior leaders and inspection observations confirm that this provision is effective.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development requires improvement.
- Tutorial work is not of a consistently good quality to ensure that all pupils benefit from the well-planned opportunities to discuss current events locally, nationally and internationally. As a consequence, not all pupils develop fully their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, and are not fully aware of what it means to be a responsible citizen in modern Britain.
- The vast majority of pupils know how to keep themselves safe and are confident to ask for help should this be needed. Assemblies are well planned so that messages about safety and different forms of bullying are reinforced regularly.
- Information provided to pupils about careers and the next stage of their education is well coordinated. College and apprenticeship providers visit the academy to conduct assemblies and drop-in sessions for pupils. Some pupils in Key Stage 4 take part in visits to universities to raise their future aspirations. As a result of the guidance provided, most pupils in Year 11 are clear about their plans for when they leave the academy.
- Most pupils are involved in a good range of additional activities, trips and visits. These opportunities enable pupils of different ages to work productively together.
- Senior leaders and pastoral staff are conscientious in looking after all pupils, especially those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Any concerns are followed up conscientiously, involving external agencies if this is necessary.
- Senior leaders liaise regularly with Rise Carr College. They make sure that the very small number of pupils who are educated off site attend regularly and behave responsibly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils' attitudes in lessons are inconsistent. This has an impact on the progress they make. In a number of lessons, idle chatter by pupils is not checked and consequently some pupils do not make the progress that they should. Pupils themselves confirm that this is sometimes the case.
- Pupils lack enthusiasm to improve their work and to respond to the advice and guidance from their teachers.
- Inspectors did see pupils working together well, and collaboration between pupils is a positive feature of many lessons.
- Academy leaders have worked successfully since the previous inspection to tackle levels of persistent absence. The proportion of pupils not attending regularly has fallen over time. Nonetheless, overall attendance in the academy is still not at the national average.
- While gaps in attendance between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are closing, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still below the overall national average. Therefore, some of the most vulnerable pupils in the academy miss the advice and guidance that staff provide about how to keep safe.
- The vast majority of pupils conduct themselves well around the academy, between lessons and at social times. Pupils report that any inappropriate conduct is dealt with swiftly.
- Inspectors saw minimal amounts of litter in the dining room or around the academy. Graffiti is non-existent and some high-quality displays are evident in corridors. Pupils respect and value this work.
- A small minority of parents who replied to the Ofsted online questionnaire have concerns about behaviour. Just over 10% of staff who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire felt that behaviour was not good, and 15% did not feel that behaviour was well managed. Inspectors found that the behaviour and attitudes of a few pupils in lessons contrast with the way they conduct themselves outside lessons and during social times. These inconsistencies are known to senior leaders, who continue to improve the situation.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' progress is not good enough across the academy. This is because there is too much teaching that requires improvement. The analysis and use of pupils' progress information by senior and subject leaders are also not sharp enough. As a result, too much underachievement is not identified early, and tackled successfully.
- Reported Year 11 outcomes since the previous inspection are too low. The academy does not meet the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11. This is because too many pupils are entered early for examinations, especially in English and mathematics.
- Pupils' final and best examination outcomes, by the time they leave the academy, are generally much higher than their first-entry results. In 2015, a greater proportion of pupils achieved five good GCSE grades, including in English and mathematics, compared with previous years. This improving overall picture was in line with the 2014 national average.
- For a small number of pupils, particularly in mathematics, early entry for examinations has not always resulted in the best possible outcomes.
- Taking their final and best outcomes into consideration, more pupils in 2015 made expected progress in English than previously, exceeding the 2014 national average. The proportion of pupils making good progress also increased to just below the national picture.
- These gains were not so evident in mathematics, where the proportion of pupils who made expected and more than expected progress, whilst rising, remained below the 2014 national average. Many pupils lack confidence in tackling unfamiliar mathematical questions, and not enough persevere to explain and justify their mathematical reasoning to others. Many pupils are not challenged sufficiently to apply their developing mathematical skills to solve problems in real-life contexts.
- The progress made by disabled pupils and those with special educational needs requires improvement because not enough teachers are aware of their needs and make sure that they have work appropriate to their abilities. Their progress in English is not as good as in mathematics.
- The progress of the most-able pupils also requires improvement. Not enough reach the highest outcomes of which they are capable, largely because the work they undertake in many subjects is insufficiently demanding. Often, the planned activities do not deepen their thinking sufficiently or provide them with problems that require them to ponder and work things out without support.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils in both English and mathematics has started to accelerate across the academy. By the end of Year 11, gaps between their progress and that of their peers in the academy, and with other pupils nationally, are closing. Attainment gaps are also closing. In 2015, at the end of Year 11, disadvantaged pupils' attainment in English and mathematics was half a GCSE grade behind their peers in the academy. In English, the attainment gap was similarly half a GCSE grade behind other pupils nationally, and just less than a full GCSE grade behind in mathematics.
- The academy's information about the very small minority of Key Stage 4 pupils educated at Rise Carr College indicates that they make appropriate progress. They gain useful literacy and numeracy qualifications, and make good progress in developing relationships and managing their emotions.
- Good support is available for pupils at risk of falling behind. For example, Year 7 'catch-up' funding is used to provide specialist resources and teaching. The academy's information on the impact of these measures shows good gains to date, especially in reading and spelling, for a large majority of pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	137122
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10002527

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	448
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sam Towle
Headteacher	Sara Davidson [interim]
Telephone number	01325 351377
Website	www.dsms.org
Email address	adminoffice@dsms.org
Date of previous inspection	13–14 February 2014

Information about this academy

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. Darlington School of Mathematics and Science is part of the Longfield Academy Trust. It became a sponsored academy on 1 January 2012.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage, with a very small minority from other ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported through the pupil premium is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding that schools receive to support those known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- Pupils are currently entered early for GCSE English and mathematics examinations.
- A very small minority of Key Stage 4 pupils attend Rise Carr College, the local authority pupil referral provision, five days a week.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been large-scale staffing changes, including new interim and executive headteachers, new senior and middle leaders, and a new Chair of the Governing Body.
- The academy receives support from Longfield Academy of Sport, and Carmel College, Darlington, as well as from specialist external consultants.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a wide range of different lessons, of which two were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Pupils' work was sampled informally in lessons in a wide range of subjects. In addition, work from Year 11 was sampled separately.
- Inspectors also reviewed a range of documents, including the academy's own assessment information on current pupils' progress, planning and monitoring documentation, minutes of the governing body's meetings, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents pertaining to safeguarding.
- Meetings were held with pupils across Years 7 to 11, members of the governing body and academy staff, including those with management responsibilities. A discussion also took place with the Chair of the Longfield Academy Trust.
- Inspectors evaluated the 38 responses of parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also took account of the views of 38 members of the academy's staff through the inspection questionnaires they returned. No pupils completed the Ofsted questionnaire, but inspectors analysed a recent survey of pupils' views by the academy.

Inspection team

Andrew Swallow, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Ofsted Inspector
Darren Stewart	Ofsted Inspector

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