

The Hermitage Academy

Waldrige Lane, Chester le Street, County Durham DH2 3AD

Inspection dates

30–31 October 2018

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Over time, by the end of key stage 4, progress for pupils from their starting points has been weak in many subjects. In 2018, pupils' progress was significantly below the provisional national averages in English, mathematics, science and humanities.
- The current progress of pupils overall remains poor, particularly that of the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders and governors have been too slow to halt the decline in the quality of education that pupils receive. It is only very recently that leaders have acted decisively to make the improvements which are required.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is far too variable. Teachers do not consider pupils' starting points well enough. Pupils find some of the work too easy because it does not stretch and challenge them.
- Until very recently, leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have not accurately identified where improvements were needed.
- Over time, leaders have not implemented an effective strategy to improve the academic progress of those pupils who are disadvantaged or pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- There is too much low-level disruption in lessons, both within and across subjects, which remains unchecked and limits the progress of pupils.
- The vision leaders have for making the rapid improvements necessary is at an early stage of implementation and is not applied universally across the school.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders now have an accurate view of the school's weaknesses and are taking the appropriate actions to make the improvements which are urgently required.
- Teaching has improved in the sixth form and, as a result, students are now making better progress.
- Governors have taken appropriate steps to secure additional support from external school improvement professionals.
- Leaders' plans and actions have led to a high proportion of pupils attending school regularly.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - establishing a clear vision for school improvement and ensuring that this is understood by all staff
 - ensuring that all improvement plans identify clear and precise actions, measurable success criteria, specific timescales and the individuals responsible for monitoring and evaluating actions
 - challenging staff underperformance swiftly and supporting staff to improve their practice
 - making better use of additional funding to improve pupils' academic progress
 - ensuring that teaching addresses weaknesses in pupils' basic literacy skills so that these do not limit their progress
 - ensuring that governors hold school leaders to account effectively
 - developing the capacity of middle leaders so that they have the skills and resources they need to improve the outcomes for pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' outcomes by ensuring that teachers:
 - are held to account for pupils' outcomes
 - plan activities which meet pupils' different needs, including those of the most able
 - provide appropriate help and support to disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND so that they achieve well
 - review schemes of work to ensure that there is a clear direction in learning and that pupils have sufficient time to explore topics in depth.
- Improve the quality of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - reducing the inconsistencies in the application of the school's behaviour management policy within the classroom
 - raising teachers' expectations in relation to acceptable standards of behaviour for learning.

An external review of governance 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

- Leaders' evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of the school are not as accurate as they could be. Their self-evaluation work correctly identifies the many weaknesses which exist but is overly positive about the improvements they believe have already been made.
- Whole-school plans of action lack the precision and detail they require to enable leaders and school staff to bring about the improvements which are needed urgently. However, some plans at subject and department level which are more sharply focused are appropriate to bring about the changes needed.
- It has taken too long for leaders to take the decisive actions necessary to make the rapid improvement the school requires in many areas. While leaders' very recent actions are now rightly focused on removing the weaknesses which exist, there is much improvement work still to do.
- Over time, leaders have not put into place a reliable means of checking the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Because of this, teaching and learning are hugely variable.
- More recently, leaders have put into place a series of 'health checks' which now provide them with a more accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. However, any improvements which have been made are in the early stages.
- Until very recently, leaders have not held teachers to account effectively for the progress of pupils. As a result, pupils have fallen behind other pupils nationally who have similar starting points. Leaders have now put into place plans and actions which are focused on linking the quality of teaching and learning to the progress of pupils.
- There is not an effective strategy to improve the academic progress of those pupils who are disadvantaged to support them, where necessary, to catch up. An external review of pupil premium funding has been completed recently, but it is too soon to see evidence of the impact of this work.
- Over time, the school's provision for pupils with SEND has not resulted in strong outcomes for pupils. The leader with responsibility for SEND, however, has an accurate view of the improvements needed and has put into place actions which are beginning to have an impact.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is a broad and balanced model which provides appropriate pathways for all pupils' needs. The recently introduced curriculum approach is encouraging staff to reflect more deeply on the curriculum and planning to meet pupils' needs. However, this is not consistently embedded across all subjects and within departments.
- Subject leaders are focused on the correct priorities. They need further support to develop the skills required to make sure that necessary improvements are made quickly.
- The vision leaders have for change is not reflected in the day-to-day practice of the school. There is a lack of a consistent application of agreed policies and plans across

the school, although staff share a determination to make the improvements which are necessary.

- Leaders have been successful in taking action to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour. Leaders are clear about which strategies have been effective and what more needs to be done.
- The recent actions of leaders have resulted in the improvement of teaching in the sixth form. Students now have increased confidence in the quality of their learning, and this is reflected in the students' work observed by inspectors and the progress students are now making.

Governance of the school

- Governors have not held leaders to account over time. As a result, they have been taken by surprise by the decline in standards the school has suffered over the past two years.
- Previously, governors have been too ready to accept the information school leaders have presented to them. They have not followed up challenging questions posed during governing body meetings. It is only relatively recently that governors have realised this. Nevertheless, governors are, of late, beginning to take appropriate action to resolve matters in the best interests of the pupils.
- Although governors are now keen to identify key performance indicators to assist them in holding leaders to account more effectively, they are still reliant upon plans which lack the detail of the impact of leaders' actions which they should expect to see. Governors acknowledge that reviewing the plans and evaluating evidence of the impact of leaders' work are a priority.
- Governors have been proactive in considering external support to help school leaders develop their rapid improvement plans. They have agreed to the recruitment of a national leader of education to advise on school improvement. It is too soon to see the impact of this external support.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff are clear about the procedures for keeping pupils safe. Staff training is up to date and the recruitment procedures for new staff are completed rigorously and in line with statutory guidance.
- Clear systems exist for recording the school's work to support vulnerable pupils. These records demonstrate the actions already taken and identify the next steps required. Leaders ensure that the culture of safeguarding they have established is given a high priority. Staff are focused on the well-being of pupils across the school.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about staying safe and know how to report any worries or concerns to relevant staff members.

- Leaders have taken past concerns about safeguarding seriously. They have investigated them thoroughly, with local authority support, and acted promptly to resolve them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching is far too variable across key stages 3 and 4. Too much teaching does not build on pupils' prior learning. Because of this, pupils are unable to link their prior learning to the topics they are now studying. This limits their progress and sometimes results in pupils losing interest in their work.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils are too low. Pupils are not expected to work in depth in a range of subject areas. The lack of challenge pupils experience in many subjects means that they find the work too easy and are liable to stray off-task. When this happens, pupils become disengaged with the teaching and begin conversations which are unrelated to their learning.
- In English, the progress pupils are making is being held back by their weak spelling and underdeveloped skills in analysing texts. Where these shortcomings have not been recognised, some pupils have difficulty completing the work they are set, and they fail to meet the expectations teachers have of them.
- Teachers across many subjects beyond English are not checking common errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Because of this failure to adopt a consistent approach to developing pupils' literacy skills, pupils' progress is hindered.
- In mathematics, inspectors observed very little opportunity for pupils across all year groups to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding to solve problems or explore mathematical reasoning. The work set for pupils often lacks sufficient challenge. Inspection evidence indicated that, at times, pupils in Year 7 are required to repeat work which they have already mastered during their primary school education.
- Opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills across the curriculum are limited. In many subjects, extended writing only occurs where notes are being copied. In English, however, extended writing opportunities are more frequent. Pupils respond enthusiastically to this, producing higher-quality work which illustrates deeper thinking and learning.
- Often, teachers give pupils too few opportunities to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding to develop their learning further. Some teachers do use challenging questions to encourage pupils to think more deeply and respond with more complex answers. This stronger practice was exemplified during the inspection, when, in geography classrooms, pupils benefited from well-planned tasks and questioning. However, this more effective practice is not typical across the school.
- The quality of the support provided in classrooms for those pupils who are disadvantaged or for pupils with SEND is variable. As a result, the quality of work these pupils produce is variable too. Where classroom support is focused and the work set is at an appropriate level to build on pupils' starting points, then pupils' progress is stronger. However, too often, the work set does not take into consideration pupils' starting points and, as a result, pupils' work is of a poorer quality and progress is weak.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. The relationships between teachers and pupils are positive, and pupils report teachers are helpful and supportive if they approach them when they have difficulties with their learning. These positive relationships were particularly evident in the music department during the inspection, where pupils were well engaged in their 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.
- Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors, staff and each other. While many pupils wear their uniform with pride, a significant proportion of pupils do not adhere to the uniform expectations set by the school. This lack of cooperation is not consistently challenged by staff and school leaders.
- The school has adopted a cross-curricular approach to the work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders have not effectively monitored and evaluated the impact of this work.
- Teachers deliver the personal, social, health and economic education programme through planned 'guidance' sessions each day. The programme covers issues such as fundamental British values, citizenship and democracy, among others. Leaders monitor and evaluate its delivery through regular observations of teaching.
- Pupils are given careers information through guidance sessions. Pupils benefit from impartial guidance and advice. This allows pupils to make more informed choices about their career pathways.
- Pupils report that bullying is rare and, where it does occur, staff deal with it effectively. The school takes its responsibility towards bullying seriously and high-profile displays around the school reinforce the message that bullying is unacceptable.
- Pupils are confident when talking to visitors. They are proud of their school and are keen to see it improve further. They report that teachers know them and support them well. They are very enthusiastic and positive about the help they can access for mental health and well-being issues. The school has a dedicated school counsellor, which pupils believe is one of the strongest features of the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In many lessons, some pupils lose their focus on learning and, as a result, engage in low-level disruption. Teachers are inconsistent in applying the behaviour sanctions available to them through the school's behaviour policy to re-engage these pupils in their learning.
- Leaders report behaviour is much improved around the school, with less unsafe and challenging behaviour evident. While inspectors acknowledge leaders' views that

behaviour may have improved recently, inspectors were also of the view that further improvement is required to behaviour in lessons.

- A few pupils reported to inspectors that they feel the corridors in the school are too narrow for the number of pupils who use them. Inspectors observed pupils paying little attention to staff instructions to keep to the left-hand side of corridors. Because of this, during the inspection, there were occasions when pupils' behaviour in the corridor was too boisterous.
- Leaders have been successful in reducing fixed-term exclusions. The recruitment of a learning welfare mentor who works with those pupils who are vulnerable to absenteeism and exclusion has been a significant factor in this improvement.
- Pupils attend regularly and the proportion of pupils who are often absent from school is below the national average. Leaders' approach to monitoring attendance and the strategies implemented to encourage good attendance are a strong feature of the school's work. As a result, attendance overall is improving.
- The school makes use of two alternative providers to support a small number of pupils. Systems for monitoring the attendance of these pupils are well established. School records show that these pupils have all improved their attendance since joining the alternative provision.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils enter the school with overall standards of attainment which are above the national averages. Too many pupils fall behind those with similar starting points and provisional results show that overall, in 2018, their attainment was below other pupils nationally.
- The progress of pupils by the end of key stage 4 in GCSE English and mathematics is particularly weak. Leaders have failed to halt the gradual decline in pupils' progress in these subjects over the past three years.
- In 2018, a lower proportion of pupils attained a strong pass in GCSE English and mathematics than was seen nationally.
- Provisional results in 2018 show that pupils made considerably less progress by the end of key stage 4 than their peers nationally in most subjects at GCSE. The progress of disadvantaged pupils, those pupils with SEND and the most able pupils was particularly poor when compared to those with the same starting points nationally.
- In a number of subject areas, teachers' assessments of how well pupils learn or make progress have been unreliable. Improvements in assessment have now been made. However, the school's own information on current outcomes reflects that many pupils are still not achieving what they are capable of.
- Evidence from visits to lessons and work scrutiny indicate that pupils' progress overall remains too variable. Leaders insist that pupils are now making better progress. However, the school's own information reflects that improvements are modest at best. Inspection evidence confirms that there is much still to do so that pupils achieve consistently well across a range of subjects.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Leaders have recently focused with determination on making the necessary improvements to the quality of 16 to 19 study programmes offered by the school. The new leadership of the sixth form has re-energised the teaching and learning. Students recognise this, reporting that there has been much improvement. They are complimentary about how they are listened to and how responsive leaders are to the student voice.
- Students are proud of their school and enjoy attending. There are very few who leave their courses prior to completion.
- Although a very recent introduction, students now benefit from work experience at the end of Year 12. They also benefit from careers advice and guidance programmes, although they report that they would like such advice to be further broadened to include destinations other than university.
- Students have the opportunity to follow a variety of A-level and vocational courses that are matched to their abilities and interests. Typically, students successfully complete these courses. Many move on to higher education. Increasing proportions are embarking upon apprenticeships. The proportion of students who are not in education, employment or training at the end of their studies is lower than the national average.
- Teachers in the sixth form know their students very well and use assessment to provide students with the guidance they need to help them improve. Teachers use effective questioning to deepen understanding and develop learning. Some students do not engage with this guidance and questioning as well as they could and, where this is the case, this limits their progress.
- The curriculum is broad and includes a full range of academic and vocational subjects. Students report that they are given the appropriate guidance they require to make their pathways choices when making the transition from Year 11 into the sixth form.
- Students' outcomes have been weak in the past. However, in 2018, students' outcomes in academic subjects have improved significantly. They are broadly in line with the provisional national averages. Leaders are aware that there remains much work to do if students' progress in academic subjects, and particularly in vocational studies, is to improve beyond average so that students make the progress of which they are capable.

School details

Unique reference number	136683
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10057879

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 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,117
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	150
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mrs Andrea Taylor
Principal	Miss Felicity Smith
Telephone number	0191 388 7161
Website	www.thehermitageacademy.net
Email address	Learning@TheHermitageAcademy.net
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is average.
- The majority of pupils are White British.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at Beacon of Light School in Sunderland and Delta Independent School in Consett.

- The school receives external support from the local authority school improvement partner and a national leader of education from a local multi-academy trust.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 59 lessons, some jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, other staff and the school's improvement partner.
- Discussions were also held with members of the governing body and the national leader of education commissioned to work with the principal.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and in a sample of pupils' books.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, around school, at breaktime and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in discussion groups and informally around the school, and met with the school council.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the strategic plan, minutes of governing body meetings, information about the attainment and progress of pupils, records relating to behaviour and safeguarding and information on the school's website.

Inspection team

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Adam Ryder	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Crossley	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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