

# Inspection of St Aidan's Church of England Academy

Hundens Lane, Darlington, County Durham DL1 1LL

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Inspection dates: 7–8 January 2020

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is a school of great warmth. It feels almost possible to reach out and touch the school's caring ethos. The pupils are proud of the school. After many changes in staffing since the last time the school was inspected, the staff are proud to work here.

To a very high degree, pupils feel safe and happy in school. They are known as individuals by the staff. There is a tone of mutually respectful conduct between pupils and staff. Behaviour is a strength of the school. Disruption is infrequent and well handled when it occurs. Almost all the pupils who made their views known to inspectors said that bullying is rare and sorted out well if it happens.

School leaders and teachers want the best for their pupils. They are fiercely determined that all pupils will do well, regardless of ability or background. Leaders go the extra mile to ensure that the pupils who attend this school have just as much right to be successful as pupils in other schools. The foundation of this is a relentless focus on the basics: good attendance, good behaviour, constant encouragement. As a result, this is a strongly improved and improving school.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders have put in place a strong curriculum. It goes beyond preparation for GCSEs. Leaders want pupils to be successful in life, so the curriculum is based on the skills and knowledge that pupils will need as they move into adulthood. The curriculum is well established across most subjects. In places, such as English, humanities, design technology and music, there are gaps in pupils' knowledge, because of changes in staffing and challenges in recruiting new staff. However, with the support of the diocese and an external multi-academy trust, recently appointed staff are in post and there are plans to recruit new staff.

The teaching is strong. Teachers know their pupils well. They use this knowledge to push pupils to learn. Teachers use questions skilfully to check pupils' understanding. Frequently, teachers' questions stretch pupils' understanding. Occasionally, some pupils feel left behind when teachers move on to the next part of the lesson without checking that everyone has understood. For the most part, teachers' subject knowledge is strong. They ensure that pupils understand and use the right subject words. This helps pupils to get to grips with the topic in hand. Sometimes, teachers stop short of extending pupils' understanding. This happens when they do not explain subject words or ideas in precise enough ways to stretch pupils' thinking.

The school is meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. Pupils with SEND told inspectors that they feel valued and supported by staff.

Currently, the number of pupils entered for examinations in the EBacc subjects (English, mathematics, science, history, geography and languages) is below the

national average. However, plans are in place to increase this number. A new leader for history and geography has recently been appointed. Entries in French are increasing.

As a result of leaders' actions to strengthen the curriculum and improve teaching, pupils have started to achieve better. At the end of Year 11 in 2019, pupils' progress in their GCSEs was markedly better than the previous year. This is also partly due to pupils' much improved attendance.

Pupils behave very well. This is founded on strong, respectful relationships and well-established routines such as 'Line-Up'. Pupils get on with their work in a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Leaders have made pupils' conduct and their personal development a priority. Pupils have many opportunities to learn about the wider world and their place in it. The school's Christian ethos is central to how pupils are nurtured as young people. The 'Faith Space', for example, provides an opportunity for pupils to quietly reflect.

The school is very well led by leaders and governors. Their unwavering commitment to the school, its pupils and the community it serves is impressive. Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders at all levels are well supported by the partnership with a local multi-academy trust and the diocese.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff with particular responsibility for safeguarding are thorough. Leaders make sure that staff are up to date in their safeguarding awareness. Links with other agencies are made in a prompt manner. Leaders carry out the necessary checks on adults who work at the school.

All the pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they feel safe in school. Pupils reported that bullying is rare but that they would be confident it would be sorted out. A very small number of pupils, parents and carers are less certain that the school handles bullying well.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The school's curriculum is not yet sufficiently coherently planned and sequenced in some subjects. However, it is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken to plan the curriculum, to recruit staff and train staff in curriculum delivery that they are in the process of bringing this about.
- The legacy of a weaker curriculum, turbulence in staffing and difficulties in recruiting staff have led to gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills in some areas. Leaders need to continue the work already started with the One Vision partner

and the diocese to fill these gaps and improve pupils' knowledge and skills further, especially in English, humanities, design technology and music.

- The standard of teaching is strong and improving overall. Continue to use professional development to sharpen teachers' use of questions to stretch pupils' understanding of topics at a deeper level. Similarly, leaders should continue to develop teachers' subject knowledge so that they can more confidently explore with pupils the nuances of subject ideas with greater precision, particularly for the most able pupils.
- The rates of pupil attendance are much improved as a result of leaders' actions. Pupils' attendance is now slightly above the national average. Together with the improvements in the curriculum and teaching, this has led to strongly improving outcomes for pupils. Leaders should maintain this incessant focus and aim to achieve a high rate of pupil attendance.
- Leaders have been very effective in bringing about improvements across the school. Not least, they have assiduously built the skills of middle leaders. Together with the One Vision partner and the diocese, leaders should continue the work already started to further build the skills of middle leaders so that the curriculum, teaching and outcomes continue to strengthen.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135314
<b>Local authority</b>	Darlington
<b>Inspection number</b>	10121709
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	463
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Ruth Lowbridge
<b>Principal</b>	Nicole Gibbon
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://staidansacademy.co.uk/">http://staidansacademy.co.uk/</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	16 November 2018

## Information about this school

- The school is an academy sponsored by the Church of England. The most recent section 48 inspection under the Education Act 2005 took place in November 2017, with the next one due between September 2022 and July 2023.
- The school makes use of two providers of alternative education: Rise Carr College and the Martin Gray Football Academy.
- The school is in partnership with the Carmel Education Trust through the Department for Education's 'One Vision' initiative.

## Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met with the principal. We met senior leaders with responsibility for pupils with SEND, for attendance and behaviour, for the pupil premium funding, for literacy and reading, and for pupils' personal development.
- An inspector met with a representative of the Diocese of Durham.
- We met members of the board of trustees, including the chair and vice-chair.

- An inspector met with the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust which is partnered with the school through the Department for Education's 'ONE Vision' project.
- As part of this inspection, we carried out in-depth considerations of four subjects, known as 'deep dives': English, mathematics, science and religious education. A deep dive consists of: a meeting with the subject leader to get an overview of the curriculum planning and how it works in practice; a visit to several lessons in that subject in different year groups, accompanied by the leader; a meeting with some of the teachers whose lessons were visited; a discussion with some of the pupils who were in the lessons visited; and a scrutiny of the workbooks of some of the pupils in the lessons visited.
- To inspect the safeguarding arrangements in school, we looked at the records of staff employed at the school and the checks made on them. We met with the staff with particular responsibility for safeguarding. We sampled case files to look at how the school identifies, helps and manages vulnerable pupils. We spoke with numerous pupils, staff and governors about safeguarding.
- An inspector met with the local authority officer with responsibility for the placement of pupils in alternative education provision and for the safeguarding checks carried out on the alternative providers.
- We considered all the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, including free-text responses and email.

### **Inspection team**

Steve Shaw, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Garry Stout	Ofsted Inspector
Shelley Heseltine	Ofsted Inspector

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