

Kirk Balk Academy

West Street, Hoyland, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S74 9HX

Inspection dates

27–28 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The progress pupils make from their different starting points, although improving, is not consistently good across a wide range of subjects.
- There is still too much variation in outcomes in GCSE option subjects, especially in humanities, modern foreign languages, and design and technology.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is not improving as quickly as that of other pupils.
- There is still too much variability in teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, teaching is not yet consistently good or better.
- The school has experienced a number of staffing changes since converting to an academy. The use of temporary teachers has led to gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. However, staffing is now stable.
- Senior leaders are supporting and developing new middle leaders. However, a few middle leaders are not using information from their departments well enough to evaluate the impact of plans to improve pupils' learning and progress.
- Most-able pupils are not challenged sufficiently. Consequently, achievement for most-able pupils, although improving, still remains variable.

The school has the following strengths

- The executive principal and the head of academy have an unwavering focus on improving the school further. Their key priorities and clear plans are improving outcomes and raising standards.
- The impact of leadership is most notable in pupils' positive attitudes towards learning and the calm and purposeful atmosphere around school.
- There is a developing culture of reading across the curriculum. This has led to an increasing number of pupils appreciating the importance of reading.
- Governors hold leaders to account. They ask challenging questions and are highly ambitious for the future of the school.
- Professional development and the leadership of teaching and learning are becoming increasingly strong.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Staff morale is high and staff are proud to work at the school. There is a shared ambition for the school at all levels.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is consistently good by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan activities that are well matched to pupils' needs and abilities so that all pupils are challenged to make rapid progress
 - disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make progress in line with other pupils with similar starting points
 - most-able pupils, including most-able disadvantaged pupils, are stretched and challenged to achieve the highest grades
 - teachers use assessment information in Years 7 and 8 more effectively to support pupils' learning to ensure that no pupil falls behind
 - pupils are given a wider range of extended writing opportunities across the curriculum.
- Continue to develop middle leaders, who are new to the role, so that they are more accurate in their evaluations of the impact of plans to improve pupils' learning and progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school's motto of 'No limits' underpins leaders' improvement planning and actions. Governors and leaders have identified a clear set of priorities to target areas of weakness. Actions taken to address the weaknesses are having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school and raising outcomes. Staff are clear about the vision for improvement. One new member of staff said, 'The drive and strive for improvement at this school is quite impressive.'
- After a period of turbulence, staffing is now stable. Morale is high and staff feel well supported by senior leaders. The executive principal and head of academy are highly visible around the school. This is helping to raise standards of behaviour and expectations further.
- Leaders have had the greatest impact in addressing behaviour and attendance issues. As a result of the implementation of robust attendance systems and a new behaviour code, 'Environment for learning', pupils' attitudes towards their learning and their attendance have improved.
- The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is increasingly strong. Consequently, the quality of teaching is improving, particularly in subjects where there has been underperformance in the past. Most notably, teaching is improving in mathematics, English, science, design and technology, and humanities.
- Middle leaders are increasingly effective. Bespoke training ensures that the majority of middle leaders have appropriate plans in place to improve pupils' outcomes further. However, a few middle leaders are not accurate enough in evaluating the impact of plans to improve pupils' learning and progress.
- Governors recognise that additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils has not, in the past, been fully assessed for impact. Governors therefore commissioned a review of pupil premium funding. This has led to the identification of barriers to learning and clear priorities for improvement. Governors now challenge leaders more robustly about the use of this funding. As a result, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved and effective attendance tracking is now in place.
- Leaders and governors make effective use of Year 7 catch-up funding. Consequently, pupils accessing catch-up funding are making good progress in their reading.
- Arrangements for the performance management of staff are appropriate, challenging and linked to improving the quality of standards. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes are improving.
- Leaders have reviewed the curriculum. It is broad and balanced and there is a range of enrichment activities. Leaders' focus on raising the profile of reading is improving literacy across year groups.
- Leaders have a coherent plan for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is mapped across the curriculum and supported by 'life' lessons. As a result, pupils have a number of opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral,

social and cultural understanding. For example, pupils talked positively about cultural visits to Barcelona and Dusseldorf.

- Governors receive regular reports from leaders on the use and impact of funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, governors acknowledge that there is a need to use this funding more effectively to improve the outcomes and progress of pupils.
- Although leaders' plans are having an impact on improving the quality of teaching and outcomes, variation still exists and, as a result, pupils' outcomes are not yet consistently good across subjects and year groups. A small number of new middle leaders are not sharp enough in their evaluation of the work of their departments. In some cases, this had led to an over-optimistic view of the progress pupils make over time.

Governance of the school

- After some instability in governance, there is now a stable local governing body. Governors effectively hold leaders to account. Governors are highly ambitious for the pupils. One governor said, 'The shift in culture at this school has raised the game for everyone.'
- Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. They are unrelenting in their desire to diminish differences in outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. As a consequence, gaps are diminishing, especially at key stage 3.
- Governors visit the school regularly. They receive regular reports from leaders and provide challenge as well as support and guidance. This ensures that leaders are focusing on the right priorities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a culture of safeguarding in the school. Pupils say they feel safe, staff say pupils are safe and most parents believe their child is safe in school.
- Training for staff is comprehensive and regularly updated. Staff are aware of local safeguarding issues and they use this information to educate pupils about risks which may affect them.
- Activities such as 'safety week', which involves workshops from the police, fire and rescue, and road safety, help to ensure that pupils are aware of how to keep themselves safe.
- Leaders have identified mental health and well-being as a priority for the school. Mental health drop-in sessions provide support for pupils, for example on exam stress.
- School leaders work in an increasingly effective way with external and support agencies. The school now has a much more robust system for identifying pupils who may need help and support. Referrals to outside agencies are now timelier, ensuring that pupils receive the support they need more quickly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable across subjects and, while improving, is not consistently good.
- Expectations of what most-able pupils can do and achieve, including most-able disadvantaged pupils, are not often high enough. Subsequently, most-able pupils are not stretched and challenged sufficiently to achieve the highest grades.
- Support for lower prior-attaining pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, differs depending on the subject and teacher. Despite the creation of 'individual profiles', identifying vulnerable pupils' needs, targets are too generic. As a result, support for vulnerable pupils remains variable.
- Teachers do not use assessment information well enough in Years 7 and 8. This means that teachers are not always clear about the progress different groups of pupils are making. New assessment procedures are less well embedded in key stage 3 than key stage 4.
- Pupils, in many cases, respond well to teachers' feedback. As a result, there is increasing evidence that gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are closing. However, the expectations of pupils' response to feedback are inconsistent across subjects and, in particular, for low prior-attaining pupils and boys.
- Positive pupil-teacher relationships are a strong feature of most lessons. Pupils support each other in lessons and typically collaborate in their learning.
- There is evidence of increasingly strong teaching in a number of subjects. Mathematics teaching is a particular strength. In mathematics lessons, teachers question pupils effectively by encouraging them to think more deeply about their learning. Consequently, pupils are able to articulate more in-depth responses to questions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- 'Life' lessons, combined with a well-organised series of assemblies, mean that pupils understand what it is to be British and live in a multicultural, democratic society.
- Pupils have good social skills and treat each other with respect in lessons and around the school. Pupils look smart in their uniform. They are polite and display good manners.
- Community links are well established. Through the 'House' system, pupils support, and raise funds for, different local charities. Pupils have worked with a local old people's home, inviting residents into school to support their computing skills.
- Pupils are tolerant of each other, and supportive of their peers. There are wide-ranging opportunities for pupils to collaborate in their learning. Pupils say that any derogatory remarks are dealt with by staff.

- A mental health counsellor and resident first-aiders, together with links with external agencies, ensure that pupils' welfare is supported. New systems to monitor this provision enable leaders to act on information in a timely manner.
- Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in school. They also confirm that there has been a reduction in bullying incidents. Pupils told inspectors that if bullying does happen, adults deal with it. However, some pupils who completed Ofsted's online pupil survey are not confident that bullying is dealt with effectively. Pupils consider that the recently introduced 'no mobile phone' policy has reduced cyber bullying. Pupils understand how to stay safe online, recognise the dangers of social media and could talk to inspectors about how to minimise risk.
- Through a comprehensive careers programme, pupils are supported to make informed choices about the next stage of their education. During the inspection, all Year 10 pupils had a careers interview with representatives from local business. Opportunities such as these are raising pupils' aspirations and ambitions. However, pupils did tell inspectors that they would like more information about university pathways earlier in their school career.
- Vertical mentoring, where older pupils support younger pupils, helps younger pupils settle into school. Extensive links with feeder primary schools also help pupils in their transition from primary to secondary school.
- Pupils appreciate the opportunities to develop their leadership skills through sports leadership programmes, enterprise challenges and projects such as 'girls into engineering'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning. They take pride in their written work and follow the whole-school presentation policy, 'PROUD'.
- The new behaviour and rewards policy is having a positive impact. As a result, incidents of poor behaviour have declined and pupils confirm that behaviour has greatly improved in the last year.
- Attendance is improving and is now in line with the national average. In the past, rates of persistent absence have been high, especially for girls, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result of new systems, including raising the profile of attendance across the school, rates of persistent absence have reduced and are now below national averages. Attendance gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are decreasing quickly.
- Pupils are rarely late to lessons and punctuality rates are high for all year groups. High levels of staff presence on corridors ensure that pupils get to lessons promptly.
- Pupils show respect for their school environment. There is very little litter around the school.
- Pupils self-manage during breaks and lunchtime, and their behaviour, with some minor exceptions, is appropriate for learning. Breaks and lunchtimes are calm and orderly.
- Although rates of fixed-term exclusions increased last academic year, due to the implementation of a new behaviour policy, they are now decreasing.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- GCSE outcomes at the end of Year 11 are still too variable, although improving in English and mathematics. Outcomes are stronger in sociology, physical education, performing arts and catering, and weaker in languages, humanities, and design and technology.
- In 2016, the progress pupils made across their GCSE subjects was below the national average, and significantly below for disadvantaged pupils and boys. Evidence from pupils' current books shows that rates of progress across a range of subjects are improving, especially in mathematics. However, progress for some groups of pupils has not been rapid enough. For example, boys make slower progress in English and humanities.
- In 2016, the progress made by pupils in English, mathematics and science was below the national average, and significantly below for disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics. As a result of the school's more effective use of funding to support disadvantaged pupils, provisional GCSE results for 2017 show an improvement in the progress made by these pupils. Leaders and governors acknowledge that there is still work to do to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress across the curriculum, and they have plans in place to address this.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made weak progress in 2016. 'The Bridge', which provides individual and small-group support from a specialist team of teaching assistants, is improving provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils in key stage 3 are making better progress.
- The attainment of most-able pupils in 2016 was below the national average. Provisional outcomes show that most-able pupils achieved a higher average grade across their subjects in 2017. Although most-able pupils currently at the school are making better progress, variation still exists between subjects.
- Leaders have made reading a high priority, with the expectation that pupils read in every lesson. This has led to a growing reading culture which is helping to develop pupils' literacy skills. However, extended writing opportunities across the curriculum, in subjects such as science, are less evident.
- Effective impartial advice and guidance given by teachers and careers advisers equip pupils to make informed choices about their next steps. As a result, all Year 11 leavers in 2017 moved on to employment, training or education.

School details

Unique reference number	140979
Local authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	10034177

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,135
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mr J Vincent
Executive principal	Ms J Nolan
Telephone number	01226 742 286
Website	www.kirkbalkacademy.org
Email address	info@kirkbalkacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

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 an 11–16, larger than average comprehensive school. The school roll is increasing.
- The school became a sponsored academy in March 2015 and is part of the Northern Education Trust.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The vast majority of pupils are from White British families. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average.

- The school uses no alternative provision.
- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum performance expectations for secondary schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a wide range of information during this inspection, including through observations in lessons, many of which were undertaken jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also visited a range of other activities including extra-curricular workshops and vertical mentoring.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors held meetings with school staff, including the executive principal and the head of academy, members of the local governing body, the chief executive officer, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and staff new to the school.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils both formally in meetings and informally during breaks and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation relating to the school's work including the self-evaluation document, improvement plans, minutes of the governing body and documents relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the 120 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, email correspondence received from parents, 66 responses to the staff online questionnaire and 78 responses to the pupil online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Michele Costello, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Crossley	Ofsted Inspector
Gordon Watts	Ofsted Inspector
Fiona Dixon	Ofsted Inspector
Bernard Clark	Ofsted Inspector

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