

Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy

Birtley Lane, Birtley, Chester-le-Street, County Durham DH3 2LP

Inspection dates

11–12 June 2019

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Uncertainty about what to do and a lack of clear direction from senior leaders have resulted in little progress since the last inspection. Many of the weaknesses identified in that inspection have not been addressed.
- Leaders have failed to improve pupils' outcomes. In 2017 and 2018, pupils continued to make significantly less progress across a broad range of subjects than was seen nationally.
- Boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) still make weaker progress. Leaders expect only marginal improvements in examination results this year.
- The curriculum has not adapted quickly enough to changes in expectations nationally. Too much of what is taught fails to challenge pupils and does not prepare them well enough for the rigour of GCSE examinations.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable. Over time, teachers have not received good enough guidance on how to improve. Homework is still used inconsistently to support learning.
- Up until Christmas 2018, exclusions were growing in number. However, changes since January have markedly improved behaviour. The use of exclusion is declining rapidly.
- The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has increased to match that seen nationally. Disadvantaged pupils are much more likely to miss school regularly.
- Governors are committed to improving the school. However, they have become overly operational and their good intentions risk undermining the work of senior leaders.

The school has the following strengths

- The recent impact of the current principal is tangible around the school. His actions have improved pupils' behaviour and conduct, and have begun to raise teachers' aspirations. In recent months, the culture in school has improved considerably.
- The school's pastoral systems provide pupils with good care and support. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered effectively.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management and governance, by:
 - improving the clarity and detail of curriculum planning, including in the sixth form, so the content taught within subjects is suitably challenging and is implemented in such a way as to help pupils retain and remember more
 - strengthening the impact of senior and middle leaders by ensuring that they get the leadership training they need, holding them fully to account and giving them licence to innovate
 - ensuring that the pupil premium is used effectively, and that plans for its use make a tangible difference to the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, especially in English and mathematics
 - ensuring that the progress made by pupils with SEND is central to the school's evaluation of the quality of its SEND provision
 - analysing why some parents choose to take their children off-roll and improving weaknesses in provision so that the number of parents choosing elective home education reduces
 - ensuring that governors stop acting operationally and focus fully on their strategic responsibilities.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by:
 - eliminating inconsistencies in the quality of teaching within and between subjects
 - ensuring that all teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils and use assessment information to plan suitably challenging work
 - equipping teachers with straightforward day-to-day strategies for getting the most out of the disadvantaged pupils in their classes
 - ensuring that subject leaders check homework is being used regularly to reinforce key ideas taught in class
 - implementing plans to improve the quality of literacy across the curriculum through a focus on subject vocabulary.

- Improve pupils' personal development and behaviour, by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders provide consistent support for classroom teachers, and that recent changes to the management of behaviour are captured in a revised behaviour policy
 - ensuring that teachers encourage and reward positive attitudes to learning and require pupils to take care with the presentation of their work
 - continuing to reduce the use of exclusion by intervening early and effectively.

- Improve outcomes for pupils, by:
 - ensuring that leaders of all subjects, but especially mathematics, science and English, accelerate the progress of all pupils, including the disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and those who have SEND.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- A lack of clarity and direction from senior leaders following the last section 5 inspection in 2017 has prevented the school from moving forward. Leaders have been unable to accelerate the progress pupils make across key stages 3 and 4. Consequently, successive cohorts of capable pupils have only reached average standards of attainment in GCSE examinations. The school continues to require improvement.
- By last summer, the governors had grown concerned about the school's progress. A change in the leadership of the governing body then followed. This precipitated a thorough analysis of the school's performance, which confirmed the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection were not being addressed quickly enough. In January 2019 the principal left the school.
- The current principal, who took up post immediately afterwards, quickly and accurately evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses. His honest and succinct evaluation meant that he was quick to focus on the most pressing priorities. Many sensible actions have begun to be implemented. However, the quality of leadership from the wider senior team and from middle leaders is variable. Some senior leaders are not demonstrating the skills to bring about rapid improvement in their areas of responsibility.
- The school's curriculum is becoming more academic, and therefore more appropriate, given pupils' starting points. Around 40% of pupils will follow the suite of subjects within the English baccalaureate next year. However, the quality of curriculum planning remains a barrier to achieving better outcomes for pupils. The school's curriculum did not evolve quickly enough when the national curriculum was revised, and new GCSE specifications were introduced. Consequently, the level of demand within schemes of work across key stages 3 and 4 is too low to prepare pupils for the raised expectations of GCSE qualifications. Some subject leaders have begun to revise their schemes of work and to raise the level of challenge. Some are also looking to ensure that there is more emphasis on pupils revisiting subject knowledge more often. However, these developments are at different stages. Consequently, the level of challenge within the curriculum remains variable.
- The curriculum does not meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils well enough. They continue to make weaker progress than their peers. Over time, the use of substantial pupil premium funding has not been well considered or evaluated thoroughly enough. The principal found no coherent planning in place when he arrived in January. His new plan, which is based on a sound evaluation of need, is not, however, having an impact on day-to-day teaching and learning. Teachers are still not clear about how to accelerate the progress of their disadvantaged pupils.
- Year 7 catch up funding is used more effectively. Pupils who are eligible for extra help get it, and make pleasing gains in the quality of their reading. The inspector listened to some Year 7 and 8 pupils read, and found that they could fully comprehend the textbooks they were working from.
- Provision for pupils with SEND is improving. Teachers receive helpful information on the needs of each pupil, although this is not always used wisely to tailor the teaching.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) knows these pupils well, but does not track the progress they are making. Consequently, the support they receive is not being evaluated rigorously enough. Pupils with SEND still make weaker progress than should be expected.

- In the last two years, 20 pupils have left the school roll to be educated at home. These pupils are leaving from different year groups and at different times of the year. Inspectors found evidence that leaders have actively tried to convince parents against this course of action. There is no evidence of purposeful off-rolling of pupils. However, leaders have not analysed the reasons why so many parents have chosen to educate their children at home.
- Positive changes in the school's culture are evident around the school. Parents, staff and pupils are pleased with the changes made since January. Most pupils conduct themselves well and are respectful of one another. The pastoral system provides pupils with good support for their personal and social development. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered effectively. Members of staff report improvements in the general behaviour of pupils. The kitchen staff, for example, report that pupils are now polite and take more care to keep the dining hall tidy. The number of exclusions is reducing. Pupils are more punctual in the morning. In tutor time, pupils engage readily with topics relating to safety, careers and topical issues that help to develop their understanding of the world. There are good opportunities for pupils to share their views through the school's democratic systems. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- Following the last section 5 inspection, governors were initially slow to recognise the inertia affecting the school. After 18 months, they began to look closely at the performance of leaders and to hold them to account more robustly. They determined that school leaders were not demonstrating the capacity to rapidly improve the school.
- Across this academic year, governors have become increasingly active and hands-on. Their frequent visits mean that they now have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, they recognise, and accept, that some of their monitoring work has crossed a line and become overly operational. At times, they have undertaken activities that are the responsibility of the school's senior leaders. This is inappropriate and risks undermining the role of leaders.
- The governors and the current principal are taking steps to improve the school's challenging financial position. They are working with the funding agency to agree how to return to a balanced budget. Urgent actions are required to ensure that the financial position of the school improves.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The culture in the school is positive and members of staff are vigilant. Child protection training for staff and governors means that they are knowledgeable and up to date in terms of the most recent government guidance and legislation.

- Staff know what to do, should they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare. Evidence from school records shows that senior safeguarding leaders work effectively with other agencies and parents to try and quickly resolve concerns.
- Thorough checks are made on adults who work in or visit the school. These checks are recorded accurately on the school's single central record.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is variable across and within subjects. Consequently, too many pupils fail to make the progress they should.
- Leaders have not addressed the areas for improvement relating to teaching that were identified in the last section 5 inspection. Over time, the direction of teaching has been typified by micromanagement and too many changes of direction when directives did not appear to work. Teachers have felt compelled to follow blanket policies and procedures that were not suited to the subjects they teach. Some good teachers have left the school.
- The current principal acted quickly upon his arrival and listened carefully to the views of teachers. He has given teachers and subject leaders more freedom to innovate and teach in a way that suits the needs of their subjects. Consequently, the climate for learning has begun to improve. The principal has also established a staff health and well-being group, which the incoming principal intends to maintain. This more collegiate approach is providing opportunities for the wider staff team to contribute to evaluating the school's effectiveness. It is also facilitating discussion on issues such as staff workload.
- Inspectors found that most teachers have secure skills in delivering the content of the lessons they plan. However, too many teachers do not have high enough expectations of their pupils, and plan work that is too easy for them. Too many lessons in key stage 3 repeat content that pupils have previously covered in primary school. Teachers do not use the assessment information that is readily available for them to plan sufficiently challenging work.
- Recently, leaders have visited good primary schools to look at the quality of work pupils are producing. This has begun to help subject leaders to replan their curriculums to be more challenging. However, these emerging schemes of work are not complete, and are not being consistently implemented by teachers.
- Teaching in mathematics has begun to improve and, after some turbulence, staffing is now more stable. However, teaching in mathematics remains variable. Work is not consistently well matched to pupils' abilities. For example, some of the work covered in key stage 3 does not build sequentially on the work pupils covered in key stage 2. Equally, inspectors found that some Year 10 pupils have gaps in their knowledge because they have not revisited topics frequently enough.
- In English, the subject leader is providing her colleagues with clear and purposeful guidance. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving. Pupils are given regular opportunities to build on their prior learning and make links between different texts and literary features to improve their own descriptive writing. Where teaching is well structured, pupils produce effective writing that demonstrates the use of high-quality

vocabulary and sentence structures.

- Plans to improve pupils' literacy across the curriculum through a focus on essential vocabulary are well considered. However, these plans are yet to be implemented.
- Extra literacy and numeracy teaching for pupils who enter the school with lower attainment is well organised. These pupils receive extra lessons in literacy and numeracy, supplemented by Project Time, which strengthens their skills in applying their reading, writing and number skills in an engaging and stimulating way. This package of support helps these pupils to make good progress.
- Homework, which was inconsistent at the time of the last inspection, is still used with varying success. In some subjects, teachers do not set homework regularly. In addition, some teachers set tasks which do not do enough to reinforce understanding of topics covered in class.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Although most pupils are confident about participating in lessons, too many do not take enough pride in their work or push themselves to achieve the standards of which they are capable. Inspectors found that when teaching was stronger and more challenging, pupils were capable of excelling. This was evident in a Year 9 English lesson for lower-attaining pupils and in the art homework of a Year 7 class. However, pupils' inconsistent attitudes contribute, in part, to their lack of progress.
- Over time, too many pupils have been regularly late for school. The principal has tightened things up and daily checks have recently improved punctuality considerably. Despite improvements, during the inspection, inspectors still found that there was room for improvement.
- Pupils cover a well-balanced personal development curriculum in tutorial time and on days when the normal timetable is suspended. Consequently, they are confident about their knowledge of how to stay safe. Lessons cover online safety and how to protect the online image. There is good work done to raise awareness of bullying. Pupils told inspectors that there is little bullying in the school, but, when it happens, they trust the staff to resolve it.
- Some parents who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the support they had received from members of the house teams when their children had suffered from anxiety or depression. They praised the flexibility shown by the school, the counselling support and the help with reintegrating their children after periods of absence.
- School leaders make regular checks on the safety and welfare of pupils who are placed in alternative provision. However, inspectors found that some of these checks are not thorough enough. The attendance of these pupils is reported to the school every day.
- Most parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, were happy about their child's welfare and safety at school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Although most pupils and members of staff recognise that there have been improvements in behaviour, a significant minority of teachers feel that behaviour in the school still needs to improve. This indicates that changes made to the behaviour management system are still not fully effective. Leaders are now asking more of teachers with regard to managing behaviour in their classrooms, and have provided staff with de-escalation training. Poor behaviour is now managed more within departments, rather than in house areas. The introduction of an internal exclusion unit has proved to be an effective deterrent to the more challenging pupils. Numbers of pupils being referred to this facility have quickly declined and fewer pupils now reoffend.
- The number of exclusions for poor behaviour has increased this year. Of the 98 exclusions that have occurred this year, 73 happened in the autumn term, reflecting the less flexible approach previously taken. Since January, the changes made to the management of pupils who exhibit more challenging behaviour have had a positive effect. The school now has a far more effective system in place.
- Most pupils conduct themselves well across the day. They use social areas respectfully. They move around the school site with purpose and few are late to lessons. Inspectors found that almost all lessons visited flowed smoothly and without interruption.
- Overall attendance is in line with the national average for similar schools. The increase in exclusions seen earlier in the school year has, however, contributed to a rise in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent. Notably, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent is nearly twice that of other pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over recent years, pupils have entered the school with above-average standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. The cohort of 252 pupils who completed Year 11 in 2018 included 133 pupils who entered the school having attained above the expected standard at primary school.
- Since the previous section 5 inspection in February 2017, pupils have made relatively weak progress. In both 2017 and 2018, pupils made significantly less progress across a broad range of subjects than seen nationally. The poor progress seen in mathematics and science, apparent at the time of the previous inspection, had not improved.
- In 2018, some groups of pupils made weaker progress than others. Boys made far less progress than girls. The disadvantaged pupils made weaker progress than others nationally and pupils with SEND made less progress than they should.
- The most able pupils also underachieved. The poor progress and consequent underachievement of the most able disadvantaged pupils was a particular disappointment.
- The relatively poor progress made by pupils resulted in overall standards of attainment being broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who attained a good GCSE pass in both English and mathematics matched that seen nationally.

- Leaders are carefully tracking the attainment of pupils currently in the school. They expect standards of attainment to improve marginally this year. They are working hard to support pupils in Year 11 with revision and exam preparation. This year, Year 11 pupils have stayed in school across the examination period, rather than taking study leave. Their time in school is being used well in most subjects and pupils told inspectors that they appreciate the extra revision sessions they are receiving.
- Assessment information indicates that the disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are beginning to make better progress. As a result, the gap between their attainment and that of others in the school is narrowing. Again, however, these gains are marginal.
- The positive effect of the current principal has re-invigorated many teachers. Some new thinking about the design of the curriculum in some subjects is beginning to ensure that the work provided for pupils is appropriately challenging. Pupils are responding well to more difficult subject content.
- Scrutiny of pupils' workbooks indicates that most pupils are applying themselves, although the work they are set is not challenging them consistently enough for them to achieve their potential.
- The qualifications taken by some pupils placed in alternative provision lack ambition. Some capable pupils who have become disaffected with school are only being offered level 1 qualifications in functional skills.
- In recent years, the proportion of pupils going into further education, employment or training after key stage 4 has been in line with the national average.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The head of the sixth form is determined that the dip in achievement seen in 2018 will not be repeated. Determined and well-targeted actions are being taken to address identified weaknesses. Students currently in the sixth form are aspirational and making strong progress.
- Leaders have carefully reviewed the reasons for last year's dip in standards and have taken remedial action. A problem was caused by some students coasting after they had received unconditional offers from universities. Leaders have addressed this issue. Through assemblies and one-to-one discussions with students currently in Year 13, they stress the importance of achieving top grades for future life chances.
- Current assessment information and the work in students' files suggest that standards in most subjects have returned to those seen in 2017, which compared favourably with national averages.
- Sharp monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is ensuring that sixth-form lessons are well planned and well delivered. The quality of discussion and debate in lessons is good, with students confident about participating and extending their thinking. Most students maintain their files well and can use their notes to revise effectively. Most students feel that the teaching they receive is suitably challenging. However, inspectors observed some lessons during which students with lower starting points needed more support to understand lesson content. Equally, there were some lessons during which the most able students found the work too easy.

- In some subjects, the design of the curriculum does not include enough opportunities for students to revisit topics or link important ideas together. This makes it more difficult for students to retain important information. Teachers in some subjects, such as science, have begun to adapt their schemes of work to include more regular ongoing revision of content. A good example of this approach was seen in a Year 12 chemistry lesson.
- The range of qualifications available mean the school's 16 to 19 study programmes provide stretch and challenge for students wanting to enter the sixth form. Study programmes include all the required elements. There is good impartial careers guidance and there are well-organised work experience opportunities. Students also receive good support with their personal development. The school uses a range of external providers to cover age-appropriate health and welfare topics. Consequently, students feel safe and well prepared for adult life.
- Students show good commitment to their studies. Their attendance at school is above that seen for sixth-form students nationally.
- A large majority of students who enter the sixth form without a good GCSE pass in English or mathematics successfully achieve this when they resit in Year 12.
- In the 2017/18 academic year, several students decided the courses they were following were not meeting their needs and did not progress from Year 12 into Year 13. However, almost all students this year have been retained on their study programme. This indicates that current students are happy with their experience in their sixth form.
- Almost all students go on to secure places in higher education, employment or training after the sixth form. Students who enter the sixth form with high attainment typically achieve grades which allow them to gain places at prestigious universities.

School details

Unique reference number	137942
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10087560

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	1451
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Smith
Principal	Simon Hawkins
Telephone number	0191 433 4026
Website	http://lordlawson.org.uk/
Email address	shawkins@lordlawson.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 December 2017

Information about this school

- Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils are White British. A small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- An average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium.
- An average proportion of pupils have SEND. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below average.

- The school uses New Leaf and Kip McGrath as alternative education providers for a small number of pupils. Some attend full-time and others attend on a part-time basis. A few other pupils are being educated in hospital or receiving home tuition.
- Changes were made to the board of governors in the summer of 2018. The board reduced in size and a new chair and vice-chairs were appointed.
- The previous principal left the school in January 2019. During this inspection, the school was led by an interim principal who joined the school immediately following the previous principal's departure. The interim principal was due to leave the school the week after this inspection, when a new substantive principal would be taking up the post.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the principal and other senior leaders, the chair and vice-chairs of the governing body, subject leaders of English, mathematics and science, a group of teachers and other members of support staff.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and a group of sixth-form students. Inspectors also spoke to other pupils more informally at social times.
- An inspector met with a group of parents who are members of the Parents' Forum.
- An inspector listened to some Year 7 and Year 8 pupils read, and discussed their interest in books with them.
- Inspectors visited lessons across each phase of the school, including the sixth form. Some observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. During lesson visits, inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and sampled a range of pupils' workbooks.
- An inspector met with the SENCo and together they visited lessons and talked to pupils to evaluate the quality of provision for pupils with SEND.
- An inspector visited one of the alternative education providers used by the school. Inspectors also visited the school's internal exclusion unit, which is used for some pupils who exhibit more challenging behaviour.
- Inspectors scrutinised a sample of pupils' books from Years 7 to 10. The sample of books included pupils who entered the school with different starting points, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, policies, assessment information, records of governors' meetings and examples of the principal's termly report to the governors. Inspectors also looked at behaviour and attendance records and wider safeguarding information.
- Inspectors took account of the 156 responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, the inspectors took account of the 99 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stuart Cleary	Ofsted Inspector
Jamie Lawler	Ofsted Inspector
Toni Spoons	Ofsted Inspector
Bernard Clark	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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