

Furness Academy

Park Drive, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA13 9BB

Inspection dates

19–20 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the last inspection, the new headteacher has inspired positive changes in the school. Staff are invigorated, morale is high and pupils are proud to be part of the school.
- Leadership at all levels has been restructured to make the best use of staff's skills. Everyone works together successfully to secure improvements.
- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved substantially due to staff reorganisation, highly effective quality assurance and well-planned training.
- Revisions to schemes of work, rigorous progress tracking and new policies have raised expectations of what pupils should achieve. Pupils rise to teachers' higher expectations for their behaviour and the quality of their work.
- Good teaching is increasing pupils' progress and raising standards across the school.
- Pupils get off to a flying start in Year 7, where teachers build on their prior learning successfully. In Years 8 and 9, increasing proportions of pupils work at standards expected for their age, having made good progress from their starting points.
- The much-improved approach to curriculum planning is ensuring that pupils in Years 10 and 11 are better prepared for examinations. However, these pupils still have gaps in their learning due to weaker provision in the past.
- The GCSE results in 2017 were better than the very low results of 2016, but still below average. The school's externally moderated assessments show that outcomes are continuing to improve.
- There is a calm and encouraging atmosphere around school and in classrooms. Pupils typically engage fully in their learning, are respectful and take care of their school.
- The school's procedures to keep pupils safe and free from risk are extremely rigorous. Bullying is rare and pupils say that they feel safe.
- The care and support for the most vulnerable pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are a particular strength.
- The governing body provides clear strategic direction and governors have the skills to sustain challenge and improvement.
- Thorough checks on teaching and learning ensure that leaders know the areas that require further improvement. Work has started to promote pupils' literacy, numeracy and verbal skills more explicitly, but they are not yet developed consistently well in all subjects.
- Most groups of pupils are now making better progress from their starting points. Occasionally, the most able pupils in mixed-ability teaching groups do not deepen their learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to quicken pupils' progress and raise standards so that GCSE results improve further.
- Embed and develop current initiatives to extend pupils' literacy, mathematical and oral skills in all subjects.
- Ensure that the most able pupils in mixed-ability groups, including those that are disadvantaged, are provided with sufficiently challenging work that deepens their learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has built on the school's strengths, tackled weaker aspects of provision and inspired further success since taking up the post in September 2015. Changes to staffing and leadership structures make the best use of skills and empower staff to work together productively. The school's reputation is growing in the local community, as indicated by the increasing number of pupils joining the school in Year 7. Staff, parents and pupils are proud to be part of the school.
- Leadership is effective at all levels. Senior leaders provide strategic direction and ensure that policies and procedures are implemented effectively. There are appropriate plans to strengthen the senior team further.
- Subject, pastoral and special needs leaders have good levels of expertise and are ambitious for pupils. They successfully ensure the quality of work in their departments and support improvements to raise pupils' achievement and promote their personal development. The introduction of departmental meetings and training every two weeks is proving successful in promoting best practice. Middle leaders are managing these developments effectively.
- Self-evaluation is incisive and leads to improvement planning that is focused on the most important priorities. There are rigorous procedures to check teaching and track pupils' progress to ensure that best practice is shared and appropriate action is taken to tackle weaker aspects.
- Previous inadequacies in teaching have been eradicated. Any remaining less-effective aspects of teaching are being tackled effectively through support plans, training and peer coaching. Teaching is now good overall and is resulting in increasingly good pupils' progress across the school.
- Professional development is planned carefully to support school improvement priorities and enhance staff's teaching and leadership skills. Leaders are outward-looking and work with external partners effectively. Leadership skills are being improved through external courses and the sharing of effective practice with leaders from Ulverston Victoria High School. Membership of Furness Education Consortium and Cumbria Association of System Leaders also supports the sharing of effective practice.
- New schemes of work have been introduced in all subjects. Teachers make good use of them to plan teaching that matches the demands of the curriculum in each year group. Teachers use the detailed progress tracking procedures to ensure that support is provided if pupils' progress falls behind expectations.
- The previous flaws in the curriculum, due to poor decisions by previous leaders, have been eliminated. The curriculum is now well planned to enable pupils to develop wide-ranging knowledge and skills at key stage 3 and ensure that they are prepared well for examinations at key stage 4. However, the previously poor planning has left older pupils with gaps in their learning, so progress at key stage 4 is not as quick as it is at key stage 3.
- Extra-curricular activities provide an exceptional range of opportunities for pupils to

extend their learning. Pupils gain enormously from experience abroad through Erasmus+ European projects such as 'Science girls' and the 'Elliot' programme, which develops theatre skills. Various STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) projects enhance learning and work-related skills. Many other clubs and activities support pupils to develop creative and sporting skills and support them with homework. Many parents commented positively on the curriculum, referring, for example, to the 'wide range of amazing opportunities'.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted strongly across the curriculum and in weekly personal development sessions taught by specialists. The teaching programme is reviewed frequently to make sure that pupils are well informed about global events and have a good understanding of different faiths and cultures, moral and ethical issues. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- British values are taught well and reinforced in the day-to-day running of the school. Pupils develop a good understanding of democratic principles through the well-developed 'pupil voice' groups. They have contributed to the development of changes to school policies and rules and uphold them with pride.
- Additional pupil premium, catch-up funding and special educational needs funding is spent wisely to provide good-quality additional support for eligible pupils. Leaders analyse barriers to learning fully and check that any intervention is well researched and supports pupils' learning effectively. The 'Bridge Project', for example, is supporting Year 7 pupils with weak literacy or numeracy skills to improve their skills rapidly.
- Parents have increasing and well-founded confidence in the school, as illustrated by the growing participation in the 'parent, teacher and friends' association', excellent attendance at parents' evenings and a positive response to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire.
- Almost all parents who responded would recommend the school. Typical comments include: 'The headteacher is making positive changes and is well regarded by students' and 'I am proud to say my children attend this forward thinking, innovative and focused learning school. It breeds aspiration and challenge across its varied curriculum.' Inspection findings confirm parents' positive views.

Governance of the school

- The governing body was reconstituted when BAE Systems took over as the new sponsor in 2015. It provides clear strategic direction and governors have the skills to challenge leaders and sustain improvements.
- Governors have stabilised the school's finances by skilfully managing the budget and rationalising staffing. Governors are clear about how decisions on teachers' pay progression are made. They manage additional funding well and are skilled in accessing additional funding to enhance pupils' experience and learning, for example through various Erasmus projects funded through the European Union.
- Governors ask challenging questions and have a good understanding of data. They are aware that pupils' achievement requires improvement and are vigilant in their checks that improvement planning is progressing.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school works effectively with parents, carers and many agencies to ensure that pupils are safe. The most vulnerable pupils are supported exceptionally well, for example in partnership with educational psychology and services for children looked after. Leaders check the safety of pupils in alternative provision and have reduced the use of alternative providers significantly because some were not meeting pupils' needs.
- All staff and governors have completed relevant training in safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty. Many have completed higher-level training. Staff are alert to risk, particularly with regard to child sexual exploitation and risks associated with extremist views.
- The school's policies and procedures to report concerns, ensure safe recruitment and record incidents are rigorous and meet requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching has been rejuvenated with the reorganisation of staffing and high-quality training. This training has enhanced teachers' skills in the subjects that they teach. Teachers have positive relationships with pupils and create a calm and constructive climate for learning.
- Teachers have raised their expectations of pupils following the introduction of new schemes of work. They have adapted their teaching successfully to take account of the new specifications.
- School policies for planning, marking and presentation are implemented consistently. Pupils rise to teachers' high expectations and present their written work with care. Pupils find teachers' feedback and the many opportunities to correct and improve their work helpful.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use accurate assessment to inform planning. The new whole-school data collection system is used proficiently by teachers to track pupils' progress. Baseline assessments establish accurate starting points and teachers are good at building on pupils' prior attainment. Homework is used effectively in all subjects to consolidate and reinforce learning.
- Teaching is typically interesting and most teachers are adept at questioning pupils and explaining new learning in all subjects. Teaching in art and in design and technology is particularly inspiring; it captures pupils' imagination and motivates them to create high-quality work. The art displays around the school are inspirational.
- Teaching is usually planned with the right amount of challenge or support for pupils. Pupils in the higher-ability groups and those who have special educational needs make especially good progress as teaching is matched well to their needs. There are times, however, when the most able pupils in mixed-ability groups are not provided with teaching or work that deepens their learning.
- Pupils' reading, writing and oral skills are developed very well in some classes. In history, for example, teachers make good use of pupils' reading scores to develop their reading skills. In English, pupils talk about their learning and contribute their views

confidently. Pupils' literacy and speaking skills are not developed consistently well in all classes, however. For some pupils limited literacy and speaking skills impede learning. They lack confidence in articulating learning and expressing themselves in speech and writing.

- The promotion of pupils' mathematical skills in lessons is similarly variable. In science, for example, the teacher used pupils' mathematical understanding successfully to reinforce learning in a Year 7 lesson. However, some teaching does not make the most of opportunities to consolidate and extend mathematical knowledge.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The strong personal development curriculum, taught by specialists, ensures that pupils are knowledgeable about risks to their safety and well-being in and out of school. Pupils are very well informed about potential risks, including those of child sexual exploitation, online grooming and abuse and radicalisation. They discuss issues maturely, know whom to turn to and what to do if they feel at risk.
- Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that they can seek help from staff if they have any concerns. Pupils have a comprehensive understanding of different types of bullying, including prejudice-based bullying based on sexuality, race, gender or disability. Those who spoke to inspectors mostly said that they are not aware of any bullying in school. A very small number said that they have experienced bullying but staff were quick to sort it out and prevent recurrences.
- Teachers create an encouraging atmosphere for learning across the school. Pupils in Year 7 show increasing confidence and pupils in a Year 10 design and technology lesson showed self-reliance and self-discipline when completing their coursework. Leaders know that there is more that could be done to develop pupils' resilience and self-motivation and this is an ongoing priority in the school's improvement planning.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance are excellent. Leaders' engagement with local employers and their involvement of further and higher education establishments ensure that pupils are well informed about their choices for the future and have varied work experience.
- The welfare and personal development of pupils in alternative provision are checked carefully. The school has reduced the number of pupils in alternative provision and the number of providers used significantly because they were not benefiting pupils.
- Pupils' confidence in the school's promotion of their physical and emotional well-being is shared by parents: 'I have every faith in the school to provide a good level of education in a safe and comfortable environment' is typical of the comments made. Parents are particularly positive about the support for the most vulnerable pupils, those who need additional help and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They feel that 'any concerns are dealt with quickly and effectively by polite and helpful staff.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- There is a robust system for behaviour management that is clearly understood by pupils and staff and applied with rigour and consistency. Pupils make a good contribution to the purposeful atmosphere in classrooms and the calm and welcoming atmosphere around school.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They are typically attentive, follow instructions and engage fully in activities in lessons. Pupils take pride in their work and look after their books.
- Pupils show respect for each other, and are polite and courteous in shared areas. They look smart and look after their school with pride.
- Attendance shows improvement from well below average to closer to average in 2016 and persistent absence is reducing. Current attendance is significantly higher than it was in the same period last year for each year group. This reflects pupils' greater engagement and enjoyment of school.
- Permanent exclusions were high in 2016, well above those of previous years and well above previous national averages. This is not typical of the school's usual exclusion rate or of behaviour currently seen in school. The exclusions are well documented and every effort was made to keep pupils in school where possible. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced year on year and the trend is continuing as behaviour improves.
- At times, some pupils lose concentration in a few lessons because teaching does not meet their needs fully. Pupils are rarely disruptive, however, and there has been a significant reduction in behaviour requiring removal from lessons. Isolated incidents that have the potential to disrupt learning are dealt with swiftly.

Outcomes for pupils

Require improvement

- Although there has been an improving trend in GCSE outcomes over time, standards at the end of Year 11 remain below average. In 2016, attainment and progress dipped in almost all subjects due to poor decisions regarding curriculum planning and timetabling that resulted in a lack of continuity in teaching and learning for that cohort. The new headteacher quickly reorganised staffing and improved curriculum planning but there was not sufficient time to negate the impact of poorly organised past provision for the 2016 cohort.
- Pupils who took their GCSEs in 2017 were supported well to make up lost ground and made good progress from their lower than average starting points. Attainment in English, mathematics and science improved, although overall attainment was still below average. Nevertheless, every pupil who left school in 2017 went into further education, employment or training because they were supported effectively to take qualifications relevant to their aspirations and ability.
- Pupils currently in school, especially those pupils in key stage 3, make much better progress from the start. Progress is improving in all subjects because teaching is better organised to meet the demands of the national curriculum. Good transition procedures support pupils to get off to a flying start in Year 7. In Years 8 and 9, pupils make

consistently good progress so that the proportion of pupils working at the standards expected for their age is increasing year on year. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are better prepared for examinations because teaching takes full account of the new specifications and engages pupils with challenging activities. Nonetheless, previous weaknesses in teaching and curriculum planning mean some pupils in key stage 4 still have gaps in their learning.

- The most able pupils make good progress in most subjects. They are challenged skilfully in the higher-ability sets. Occasionally, in mixed-ability groups, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not make progress in line with their capabilities because teaching does not deepen their learning as well as it could.
- Lower-attaining pupils are supported effectively to catch up in Year 7 and are taught well in subjects across the school. They make good progress from low starting points. There are times, however, when their literacy, numeracy and oral skills could be extended more effectively in subjects across the curriculum.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported extremely well so they make good progress. Their needs are assessed in detail and adaptations are made to teaching and the curriculum as needed.
- Disadvantaged pupils make up almost half of the school. The pupil premium is used increasingly effectively to ensure that differences with other pupils nationally are diminishing, albeit from a low baseline. In 2016 their attainment and progress were similar to other pupils in school and well below the average of all pupils nationally. As with other pupils in school, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving in each year group and most markedly in Years 7, 8 and 9.

School details

Unique reference number	135940
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10032202

This inspection of the school 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 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	768
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Tony Burbridge
Headteacher	Simon Laheney
Telephone number	01229 484270
Website	www.furnessacademy.co.uk
Email address	slaheney@furnessacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–22 April 2015

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.
- Furness Academy became a sponsored academy in 2009, bringing together three predecessor schools on two sites. In 2013 the school moved to a new building on a single site. BAE systems took over sponsorship in September 2015.
- From January 2012 to April 2015 the school required special measures. At the last inspection, it was judged to require improvement.
- The school has undergone substantial changes since the last inspection. The current headteacher took up post in September 2015 and a new governing body was formed. Over 20 teaching staff and 40 support staff have left the school. Six new teachers and 12 support staff have started.

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average overall. The proportion who have a statement of special education needs or an education, health and care plan is well above average.
- The school did not meet the government's floor standards in 2016, which are the minimum expectations of pupils' attainment and progress. The school also met the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 4 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Floor standards for 2017 were not published at the time of the inspection.
- The school uses alternative provision for a very small number of pupils, from Cowan Park Farm and Dropzone. A small number attend South Cumbria Pupil Referral Unit.
- The school works in partnership with Ulverston Victoria High School and is part of the Furness Education Consortium and Cumbria Association of System Leaders.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in most subjects and all year groups. They looked at pupils' work in lessons and scrutinised a sample of work in detail. They observed pupils' behaviour around the school, at breaktimes and between lessons.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about learning and behaviour in lessons and breaktimes and in meetings.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation; improvement planning; information on the progress of pupils currently in school; records of monitoring, performance management and quality assurance; attendance and behaviour records; and records relating to safeguarding.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the headteacher, senior leaders, subject and pastoral leaders, staff and representatives of the governing body. Telephone contact was made with alternative providers and the school improvement partner. The local authority educational psychology and services for children looked after also provided information to inspectors.
- Inspectors took account of 161 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 52 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jean Olsson-Law, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jackie Cahalin	Ofsted Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Edmondson	Ofsted Inspector

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