

Inspection of Mary Astell Academy

Linhope Road, West Denton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE5 2LW

Inspection dates:	24 and 25 September 2024
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Andrea Spowart. This school is part of Prosper Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Christopher Richardson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Joanne Clifford-Swan.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils join Mary Astell Academy after a permanent exclusion or if they need time away from mainstream school. The school works to re-engage pupils with positive school routines. Leaders have created a purposeful school environment. Pupils who attend full time, learn in key stages. Each key stage learns in a separate part of the school building. Pupils on temporary placements learn in their own dedicated area. This helps pupils to settle into familiar age-appropriate learning spaces.

Many pupils attending the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Some pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Pupils access personalised support in 'The Hub'. This is a therapeutic space where pupils receive a range of support and targeted interventions. Leaders are proactive in supporting the assessment of pupils' SEND. This allows pupils to make a quick start to learning.

The number of pupils entering the school has stabilised over time. Incidents of negative behaviour have reduced. This means that most pupils are happy and feel safe in school. The school is well resourced. Dedicated spaces for food technology, pupil recreation and multi-use sports engage pupils. Pupils show pride in their school. Some pupils have painted engaging murals that promote the school's values of aspiration, integrity, kindness and resilience. Most pupils reflect the school's values in their conduct.

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

After a period of instability, the school has focused on improving the curriculum. Additional leadership capacity, provided by the trust, has ensured the school is now able to take the right action to improve the curriculum experienced by pupils. Some areas are more developed than others. For example, in food technology, pupils learn essential skills to better prepare them for life and future careers. In contrast, the school's programme to develop pupils' reading and phonics knowledge is in its early implementation. Staff are not consistently developed in its delivery. Leaders acknowledge that some curriculum improvements are being embedded and refined to ensure that they meet pupils' needs well. This includes pupils with SEND. The impact of the curriculum improvements is still to be realised. Leaders are closely monitoring the improvements to ensure they are effective.

The school has invested in resources and staffing to help pupils attend school regularly. Despite this, too many pupils do not attend school regularly and some pupils are severely absent. This impacts their learning and wider development. When pupils do attend school, the environment is calm and orderly. Pupils are generally polite and courteous. They are effectively supported by staff who know each pupil well. Staff follow pupils' support plans carefully. They implement well-thought-out strategies to help pupils to manage their emotions. Staff take time to build trusting relationships. Pupils know they can rely on adult support if they have a concern. This reassures pupils.

Pupils' personal development is clearly mapped out. It includes a range of experiences and opportunities to develop pupils' resilience. They visit local places of interest such as Durham Cathedral to strengthen their cultural knowledge. The trust funds residential visits

to destinations that include the Tower of London. These strengthen pupils' understanding of British history. Pupils learn how to keep themselves healthy and look after their mental health. For example, they understand the benefits of eating well and the positive impact of exercise. Pupils develop their talents and interests through a range of activities. They speak highly of opportunities to express themselves in artistic or musical ways. Some of their artistic work has featured on the television. Pupils learn about the world of work and next steps after school. They are effectively supported with frequent impartial guidance. This means most pupils go on to positive destinations when they leave Year 11.

Staff are mostly positive about working at the school. They feel well trained and supported by leaders to manage their workload. Teachers, including early career teachers, receive professional development to strengthen their practice. For example, they have received training on questioning and how to develop pupils' vocabulary. Governors and trustees are well informed and knowledgeable. They insightfully challenge and support leaders about the school's work. They, along with the CEO and director of school improvement, have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas to improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not have a coherently sequenced phonics and reading programme in place. This means that some pupils do not become fluent readers quickly enough. The school should ensure that an effective phonics and reading strategy is put in place and staff are skilled to deliver this.
- In some subjects, the curriculum is new and not fully embedded. This means that pupils are not learning as well as they could. The school should ensure that the subject curriculums are implemented consistently well in all subject areas.
- Too many pupils do not attend school regularly. They miss important learning, which negatively impacts their academic progress and personal development. The school should continue to work with pupils and families to raise awareness of the importance of good attendance so that more pupils attend school every day.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	144358
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10346689
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Joanne Clifford-Swan
CEO of the trust	Christopher Richardson
Headteacher	Andrea Spowart
Website	www.maryastellacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 June 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Mary Astell Academy is an alternative provision for pupils aged between 11 and 16 years. It is one of five schools in Prosper Learning Trust.
- The school caters for pupils who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools and for pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion. Pupils join the school throughout the academic year from schools within the local authority and surrounding areas.
- Most pupils have SEND and some pupils have an EHC plan.
- The academy currently places five pupils into five other alternative education providers. Each of these providers is unregistered.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors found the age range of the school to be 11 to 16 rather than 5 to 16 as shown on GIAS. Inspectors notified the Department for Education of this as the appropriate authority.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the CEO, director of school improvement, headteacher, senior leaders, and teaching and support staff in the school. The lead inspector spoke to members of the governing body and members of the board of trustees. An inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and food technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work. The provision for teaching reading was also closely scrutinised.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- An inspector held a discussion, by telephone, with three unregistered alternative education providers used by the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils, staff and parents. This included any free-text responses to Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors took account of the school's analysis of its own surveys of parents' opinions.

Inspection team

David Mills, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sharon Common

Ofsted Inspector

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