

Excelsior Academy

Structure and Organisation

Excelsior Academy opened in new purpose built accommodation in September 2008. It replaced West gate Community College which was an 11- 18 co education comprehensive school in the West end of Newcastle upon Tyne. When full Excelsior can provide education for 1500 11- 16 pupils and 300 post sixteen students.

Excelsior is on a new site about 2 miles from the predecessor school. The predecessor school was close to the city centre, on a very busy main road with a frequent bus service to the city centre provided by a number of bus routes with stops directly outside the school. Excelsior is located on the edge of a former local authority housing estate (now managed by a housing association) with a limited service by public transport.

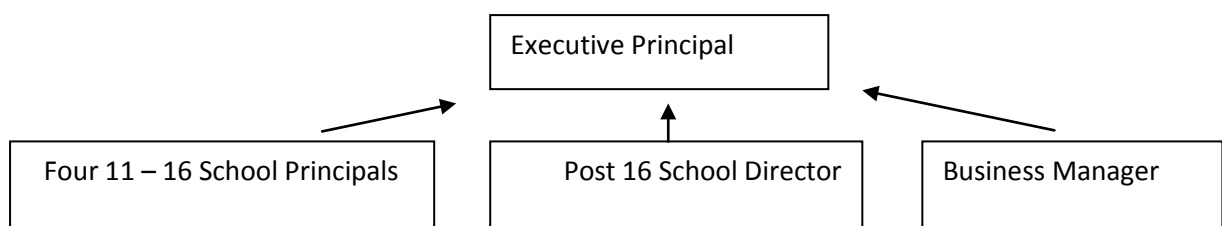
Excelsior's structure and organisation is based on a schools within a school model. It is one Academy with overarching policies that have been developed with staff, pupils' parents and governors. However its organisation and operation is through four autonomous 11 – 16 schools and an 11- 18 school, each with their own autonomous School Principal.

Each of the four 11- 16 schools can accommodate 375 pupils, through five cohorts of up to 75 pupils. Excelsior College can accommodate 300 students.

Each of the four 11- 16 schools has its own pupils, staff, accommodation and curriculum, led and managed by its own School Principal and strategic management team. Each School Principal is responsible for the leadership, management, organisation and performance of all aspects of her/ his school within the framework of The Academy's vision, aims and policies. S/he is directly accountable to the Executive Principal who is accountable to The Academy Governors and DCSF.

The post 16 School, Excelsior College is led and managed by an autonomous College Director who is accountable directly to The Executive Principal. Staff members from all four 11- 16 schools have the opportunity to teach there.

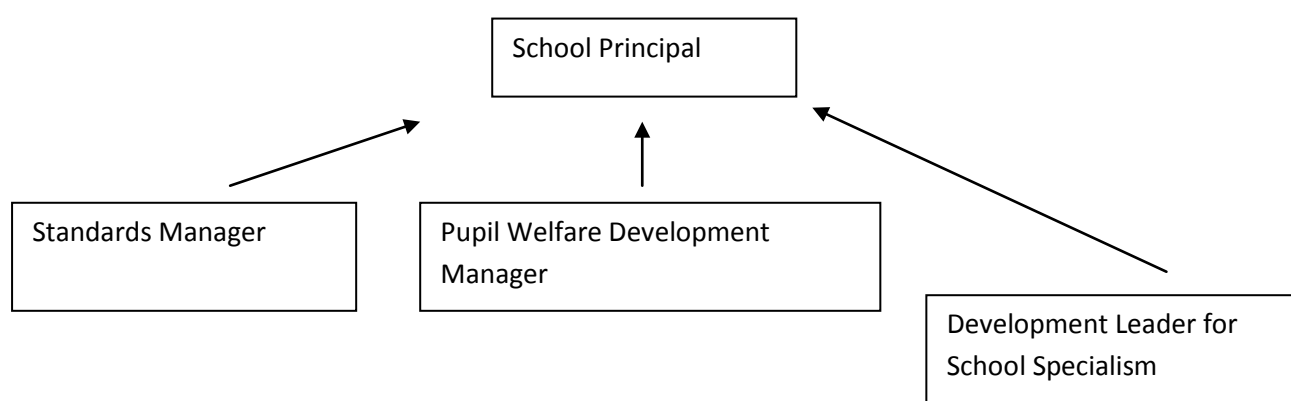
Excelsior Academy Overall Strategic Team



Each of the four 11- 16 schools has a strategic Leadership of three, the School Principal, a Standards Manager and a Pupil Welfare Development Leader who is not a teacher. Standards Managers are equivalent in terms of salary and expertise profile to applicants who could be Assistant Headteachers in a typical secondary school.

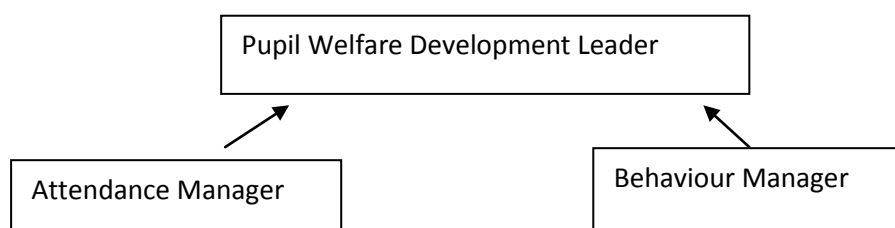
Each School also has a Specialism Development leader who is responsible for the development of their school’s specialism within their school and across the Academy. Their previous experience profile would typically have been at least Head of Department or Faculty level.

Strategic Leadership Team for each of the Four 11 – 16 schools



The Pupil Welfare Development Leader for each school leads and manages a team of Welfare workers including an Attendance Manager and a Behaviour Manager within their school. Staff employed to these teams are not employed as teachers and don’t have a background as a teacher.

Structure for the Management of Pupil Welfare in each of the four 11 – 16 schools



Staff are employed to work with pupils in one of two roles - Teacher or Curriculum and Pupil Support Worker. Each of the four schools has about 30 staff members. All staff are responsible for discipline and pupil welfare.

Excelsior operates a pupil mentoring scheme which provides every pupil with a half hour timetabled one to one session with their personal mentor at least once every two weeks. Their mentor is a member of staff within their school. All staff employed to work with pupils are

mentors and a number of staff members from the other teams – Site, Administration and Catering are also pupil mentors and are all linked with one of the schools. We don't have Tutor Groups. The purpose of the mentoring session is to provide each pupil with the opportunity to discuss their learning and progress with an adult who knows them well. Many pupils need and access a personal mentoring session more frequently than once every two weeks, for some this is necessary on a daily basis.

The overall specialism of Excelsior is Business Enterprise. In addition each of the four 11- 16 schools takes an academy wide role in developing a specialist area –

- Armstrong Business School
- Hadrian Environment School
- Jefferson Arts school
- Milburn Health School

While the individual School leads on the specialism, part of its responsibility is to ensure that all other schools provide equally good opportunities and experiences in that area and no pupil is advantaged or disadvantaged in any curriculum area by being in any one of the four schools with regards to any curriculum opportunity or experience.

Excelsior provided a unique opportunity to build an Academy to meet the needs of a community. It was an opportunity therefore to start from pupils' needs and community needs and design a curriculum and building to deliver the necessary teaching, learning and support to raise standards and aspirations, rather than to adapt or build on an organisation that already existed.

The community is one characterised by exceptionally high levels of poverty and deprivation. The attainment levels of pupils through the predecessor school were significantly below national averages. The challenge to raise standards, aspirations and expectations is considerable.

Our aim is to provide the structure, security and accountability that pupils can benefit from, through being known well and supported by a small number of adults and within a small school, while also benefitting from the extensive resources and staff expertise that is provided by a large secondary school. We aim to have no "invisible children."

We decided to build our staff teams around pupils' needs where the common interest or focus of each team would be the pupils. This is very different from a typical secondary school structure where the organisation is around subject departments and the common team interest or focus is the subject.

Excelsior doesn't have subject department teams and therefore don't have heads of department.

Each school has its own staff and own range of subject specialists, so for example in the individual schools the Maths teacher may be next door to the English Teacher who might be

next door to the History teacher. Pupils in KS3 are taught exclusively by their school staff either within their school's building/accommodation or in one of the shared specialist areas for example PE. Pupils in KS4 are taught by their own school staff within their school building/accommodation for core subjects or those that are classroom based but can choose to follow any of the specialist options offered by any of the four schools.

Staff within each school work together to develop their school's curriculum and its delivery, so staff from all disciplines work together. This has provided a number of opportunities for staff from different subject bases to develop integrated approaches to curriculum delivery.

There are many good examples of integrated curriculum delivery in all four schools – for example Scimatics at KS3 in Hadrian Environment School, Shakespeare Day in Jefferson Arts school, Bastille Day in Milburn Health School and Enterprise Day in Armstrong Business School.

Each subject specialist is responsible for the delivery of that subject within their school. Subject Development Leaders are appointed for all traditional subjects and a number of other development areas for example EAL, Literacy. Their role is to work with School Principals to ensure high quality delivery and standards in each of the five schools. While each Subject Development Leader is a member of one school and teaches in that school s/he has a number of hours each week where s/he works with the other schools.

Subject Development Leaders provide support/advice for developments and standards within each of the four schools and facilitate sharing good practice across all four schools. The work they do is through agreement with School Principals. This could include, for example, supporting a newly qualified teacher, working with a team of staff to develop a project or area of work, working with Standards Managers to monitor standards including lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work.

Accommodation

Excelsior Academy is one building arranged on four levels. It is possible to go to any part of the academy without going outside. Access control on internal and external doors ensures that the separate schools and teaching areas are defined as completely separate and autonomous.

Each school has its own section of the overall Academy building and its own dedicated external social space.

Access control on internal doors that divide the schools doesn't allow pupils to move between schools.

There are some shared resources and teaching areas, for example, sports/PE facilities, specialist technology. Pupils are taught in these areas by the specialist staff from their school.

Organisation of the Teaching Day

The parameters of the Academy day in terms of start and end times are the same for all four 11 – 16 schools:-

- Monday – Thursday 8.30 am – 3.45pm.
- Friday 8.30am – 2.40pm.

Each school has a 30 minute lunch break. Each of the four 11- 16 schools has a different lunch time. Each of the schools organises its break times to fit with its curriculum structure. Schools work co operatively to ensure that no more than two schools have the same break time period and that pupils from different schools don't share the same external social spaces at break times.

There are a few occurrences when School Principals need to work together to agree common times of lessons or access to specialist resources. These include timing of PE lessons and timing of KS4 options that are offered to pupils in all 4 schools. Apart from these situations, each School Principal has complete autonomy for the content and organisation of their curriculum, including length and timing of lessons.

Allocation of staff to schools

All four of the 11 -1 6 schools have the same staffing structure and an equal allocation of staff at all levels. They all have specialist teachers for Mathematics, English, Science, Information Technology, Technology, History, Geography, a Modern Foreign Language, PE, Religious Education, Art, Music, and Drama.

Staff work almost exclusively within their schools. Exceptions are, for example, specialist options at KS4 are offered to all academy pupils and a teaching set may comprise pupils from up to all four schools.

Staff were allocated to schools initially to ensure a balance between responsibilities, experience, expertise, age, gender, staff transferring from the predecessor school through TUPE (70%) and new staff appointed externally.

As schools develop School Principals can reorganise or restructure their school within the parameters of the staffing cost that is equal for all four schools.

Allocation of Pupils to Schools

It is our aim to maintain four equal 11 – 16 schools. Pupils who transferred from the predecessor school were allocated to one of the schools which were balanced as far as possible in terms of potential academic ability, gender, ethnicity, SEN and EAL needs.

When pupils join us at 11+, parents apply to Excelsior Academy not to one of our four schools. Pupils are allocated to one of the schools to maintain an equal balance as described above.

As all four schools provide all pupils with equal access to all curriculum areas and areas of specialism, pupils are not allocated to a school in accordance with their preference for a specialism.

Teaching and Learning

There are Academy wide Policies for Teaching and Learning including for example Assessment for Learning, Tracking Pupils' Progress, Reporting and Recording, SEN, EAL. School Principals are able to develop teaching and learning within the parameters of overall Academy Policies.

The Four Schools are expected to be collaboratively competitive. This means that they are able to develop their own approaches/strategies/methods but must closely monitor and evaluate impact and share good practice and success with the other Principals. It is the responsibility of the Executive Principal to make sure that the approaches of all four schools are having an equally positive impact on raising standards for all pupils.

Monitoring Quality

Each school has its own School Principal and Standards Manager who are responsible for the standards of attainment and progress of all pupils in their school, in all subjects /curriculum areas. Each school also has a Development Leader for the School's specialism. S/he is responsible for the development of that specialism within their school and across the Academy. Their work is managed and monitored by their School Principal. Other School Principals are responsible for the development of the different specialisms within their school and it is their responsibility to maximise the support and advice offered by the different development leaders within the time frame given.

A number of other Development Leaders with Academy wide remit for the development of different subjects /curriculum areas are employed and allocated equally, as far as possible across the four 11 – 16 schools. Their timetabled teaching commitment is within their school. In addition there are a number of hours every week where they are expected to work in the other three 11 – 16 schools, or Excelsior College to support or monitor the development of their specialism. Their work is managed and monitored by their School Principal who must work co operatively with the other Principals to identify the work that they will undertake in each of the other schools and ensure that this can be completed within the specified timescale. School Principals are responsible for the work of Subject Development Leaders within their schools and for reporting the quality of their work to their School Principal.

Pupil Welfare and Support

There are Academy wide policies for all aspects of Pupil Welfare including attendance, rewards and sanctions, behaviour. As with Teaching and Learning, School Principals and their teams develop their own approaches/strategies within the parameters of our Academy wide policies and must monitor evaluate and share good practice. Referrals to external agencies are through Academy wide priorities decided by the Executive Principal

During our first year the operation of Excelsior has been closely reviewed and monitored. Staff views have been extensively sought including, individual interviews meetings, group meetings and interviews and an opportunity to give an anonymous written response. The staff response was overwhelmingly positive from both the TUPE transfer staff and those who joined us from elsewhere.

In response to the opportunity to give three positives from the first year, the vast majority of staff identified

- The Schools within School model - belonging to a small school team who are very positive
- The positive impact of the model on the attitude and behaviour of the pupils
- The opportunities to plan and develop curriculum with colleagues from many disciplines
- Improvement in teaching and learning
- Feeling well known and valued by so many people
- The opportunities for career progression and professional development

No teacher left Excelsior at the end of the first year. Four Curriculum Support Workers and a member of the Administration Team have been successful in their applications to train as teachers through GTP next year.

We have been keen to ensure that Excelsior teachers are not missing out on opportunities that they would have from traditional roles or experiences in schools with traditional structures. We have worked closely with two groups of teachers to monitor this:-

- Subject Development Leaders
- Newly Qualified Teachers

Subject Development Leaders include teachers from the predecessor school as well as teachers from elsewhere. Some had been Heads of Department; others were new to the middle management role.

The overwhelming response from our Development Leaders is that they feel that the role that they have enables them to work with staff and pupils to develop and raise standards in their subject, giving them opportunities that the typical Head of Department role doesn't. They have planned time during the academy day when they work with other colleagues on the curriculum and have been involved in a number of exciting developments as well as monitoring standards. The key differences and advantages they identify are that their time is spent on teaching and learning and not on managing discipline or managing resources.

Eight newly qualified teachers were part of Excelsior's first year team. They had a lot of contact with their friends/colleagues from University as well as through the LA's NQT programme. All have been very positive and excited about their first year and feel that they have had many advantages above their friends in traditional schools. Examples include the opportunities to work so closely with and learn from so many staff from disciplines beyond their own, the opportunities to work with other specialists in their own subject across the Academy and particularly Development Leaders, there were up to four different ways that schools delivered their subject and this meant that they were not restricted by tradition in the

way they could deliver, how quickly they became part of the team of staff and felt valued equally, the structure of the schools supported pupils' behaviour and minimised opportunities for disruptive behaviour amongst pupils.

Pupils views are regularly sought and they are overwhelmingly positive about Excelsior. The advantages that they see are:-

- The small schools have really improved behaviour during lessons, during the day and at break and lunch times
- They like feeling part of their school and like the fact that most people know each other
- There are lots of opportunities
- They feel that they are known
- Many say that bullying is much improved
- Many feel that they have settled to work much better

Excelsior inherited a huge challenge to raise standards of attainment, behaviour and attendance amongst our pupils. Our monitoring shows that at the end of our first year the impact of our model has been felt already. There are many examples of good progress in all aspects of that challenge and we believe that this will continue at a pace during the coming years.

P. M. Marshall
Executive Principal

August 2009

