

Ashton-on-Mersey School

Cecil Avenue, Sale, Cheshire M33 5BP

Inspection dates

22–23 January 2019

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	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils' attain highly. The proportion of pupils who achieve a standard pass, or strong pass, in English and mathematics is above the national average.
- Across both key stages 3 and 4, pupils make consistently good progress across a wide range of subjects. Lower-ability pupils make particularly strong progress.
- Provisional data for 2018 highlights that the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, including children looked after, has improved significantly. Nevertheless, these pupils can and should make even better progress.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress from their starting points.
- The curriculum is well planned at both key stages 3 and 4. There is a good balance between academic and vocational subjects. An above average and increasing proportion of pupils follow the English Baccalaureate route.
- The trust, the local governing body and the executive headteacher have a strong vision for further improvement. They are highly skilled and dedicated to excellence.
- School improvement planning is sharply focused on the key actions that will further improve the school. However, plans do not contain sufficient detail to ensure that trustees and governors can measure the impact of leaders' work.
- Teachers receive good-quality ongoing training. They have increasingly high expectations of their pupils. However, the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are not consistently challenged to excel.
- Teachers have excellent questioning skills. They use this expertise to develop pupils' oracy skills, to address misconceptions in learning and to enable pupils to demonstrate and apply their knowledge.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They are diligent and committed to their learning. Pupils show respect for each other's points of view and they have the utmost respect for their teachers.
- Pastoral support is a key strength of this school. Pupils say that they feel safe and that bullying is extremely rare. Safeguarding in this school is highly effective.
- There is a strong commitment to equality and diversity. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- Overall, pupils' attendance is above average. However, despite improvements, some disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly enough.
- Students in the sixth form make striking progress from their individual starting points. This is because of high-quality teaching, students' excellent attendance and behaviour, and strong, effective leadership.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the successful strategies that leaders have put into place to ensure that disadvantaged pupils, including children looked after, make the best possible progress.
- Further reduce the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school.
- Ensure that teachers enable the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, to excel.
- Ensure that the school development plans enable trustees and the local governing body to measure the success of leaders' actions to improve the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Trustees, the local governing body, the executive headteacher and the leadership team have a vision that 'no pupil will be disadvantaged' at Ashton-on-Mersey School. They are well on their way to ensuring that this vision becomes a reality.
- Since his appointment, the executive headteacher has meticulously refocused the work of leaders and teachers across the school to ensure that pupils' outcomes improve. There is a renewed commitment to excellence. For example, there is now a much sharper focus on improving the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and children looked after. The strategies that have been put into place ensure that these pupils are on track to catch up with other pupils nationally. Nevertheless, leaders have correctly identified that there is still some way to go until these pupils make outstanding progress.
- The use of additional funding is effective. Leaders use the pupil premium funding with increasing success to improve the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. There is a clear plan that is reviewed and evaluated for its impact. The additional funding for pupils with SEND is also well used to ensure that these pupils make good progress across their subjects.
- Those pupils who enter the school with literacy and numeracy levels below age-related expectations are also supported to catch up. The additional funding that the school receives is used well to provide individual tuition, small-group tuition and to give pupils access to support materials. The funding is targeted effectively to increase pupils' reading ages and to increase pupils' confidence and competence in mathematics.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Self-evaluation is precise. It is informed by frequent monitoring of the quality of education that the school provides. However, although school improvement planning documents contain the correct priorities, they do not always enable trustees and the local governing body to measure the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the school.
- Middle leaders are effective. They ensure consistency in teaching, learning and assessment across their departments. Consequently, most of pupils make consistently good progress from their starting points.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is good. Staff receive a high-quality ongoing training programme that is closely linked to leaders' key priorities for improvement. For example, leaders provide effective training so that teachers have a range of strategies to 'demand more' of their pupils. Teachers have also been trained to use assessment differently. The focus of assessment is to help pupils to recall and retrieve information.
- Newly qualified teachers and recently qualified teachers feel well supported by leaders. They are proud to be a part of the school.
- Within the school, the initial teacher education provision enables a high proportion of teachers to be accredited mentors for trainee teachers. This provides additional high-quality training for the school's teachers as they reflect on, refine and develop their own teaching practices.

- Leaders track pupils' progress and attainment assiduously. They have high aspirations for their pupils. The trust-wide assessment and target-setting systems enable senior leaders and middle leaders to make comparisons between how well pupils are progressing across the schools within the multi-academy trust. This professional dialogue of support and challenge contributes to the good quality of education provided by the school.
- The curriculum is well planned and there is a strong rationale for the curriculum provision on offer. There is a good balance between academic subjects and vocational subjects. Leaders are also very ambitious for their pupils. Currently, around 40% of pupils are entered for the English Baccalaureate. However, this figure is set to rise in September 2019 to around 70%. Across the trust, subject leaders ensure that schemes of work are well thought out and that lessons are sequenced effectively so that pupils make secure gains in subject knowledge and understanding.
- There is a wide-ranging extra-curricular programme that enhances and complements the curriculum offer. Pupils have access to over 40 clubs every day. They enjoy the range of activities on offer, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award, the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) club, photography, art and design, sporting activities, music and performing arts. There is also a well-regarded debate club and a trust-wide debate competition.
- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is strong. There is a comprehensive programme of activities that covers all aspects of SMSC education. Audits of provision are completed annually to ensure that the quality of provision is reviewed and that it meets pupils' needs.
- Leaders are committed to reducing staff workload. They are considerate of work-life balance and staff well-being where new policies are implemented. For example, trustees, the local governing body and school leaders assessed the impact of the school's marking and feedback policy on teacher workload.

Governance of the school

- Trustees and the local governing body are passionate about securing the best possible education for the pupils at Ashton-on-Mersey School. They have a clear vision that every pupil must 'Believe. Achieve. Succeed.'
- Trustees ensure that the local governing body has the skills and aptitudes required to make a positive difference to the education that the school provides for its pupils. The chair of governors and vice-chair of governors have a secure understanding of how well most pupils progress across the curriculum.
- The local governing body reports effectively on its work to the trustees. The scheme of delegation provides clear roles and responsibilities to ensure the smooth running of the school.
- Leaders do not always provide trustees and the local governing body with sufficient information on which they can measure the impact of their work to improve the school. Improvement planning documents, for example, contain too few measures of success on which trustees and the local governing body can hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The trustees, the local governing body and leaders ensure that pupils are safe and stay safe at school. They review policies regularly and ensure that they undertake all the required checks on staff before they commence employment. Leaders ensure that risk assessments and health and safety checks are routinely undertaken and that the outcomes are reviewed.
- Pupils told staff that they feel extremely safe in school. There is a strong system of pastoral support and the safeguarding team has been expanded. Pupils know who they can talk to if they have any concerns. Appropriate filtering and monitoring systems are in place to protect pupils when online.
- Staff receive regular and appropriate safeguarding training that is relevant to the local context. They are regularly briefed on any emerging issues and, consequently, are very knowledgeable about current safeguarding concerns.
- Record-keeping is a strength and leaders work effectively with a range of stakeholders, including parents, carers and those from a range of agencies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan lessons effectively to help pupils to learn. They sequence learning well. They provide timely support to pupils who may need additional advice and guidance. Teachers' planning for progress was particularly strong in key stage 4 mathematics.
- Pupils respond very well to the activities that their teachers prepare, and no time is wasted in lessons. Consequently, pupils make good progress over time.
- Across the school, teachers ensure that pupils' behaviour in lessons is at least good. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils apply themselves to their learning, demonstrate pride in their work and, consequently, most pupils make strong progress from their starting points.
- Teachers craft their questions to great effect. The precision in which they target questions enables them to accurately assess pupils' progress, to address misconceptions and to allow pupils to demonstrate gains in knowledge.
- The school's assessment and feedback policies are applied consistently well. Pupils take time to respond to feedback and they commit to improving their work. Pupils value the oral and written feedback that they receive. They say it helps them to take the next steps in their learning.
- Across both key stages 3 and 4, teachers develop pupils' oracy skills well. Consequently, pupils engage with one another in mature discussions about the topics that they are learning. Pupils' oracy was particularly well developed in citizenship, humanities, science and English.
- Leaders recognise that more work is required to improve the quality of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. They already have effective plans in place to address this aspect of pupils' learning and progress.

- Teachers effectively focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning for disadvantaged pupils. However, some of the strategies in place to reduce further the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are not fully embedded. For example, teachers do not always reflect on the individual barriers facing disadvantaged pupils to secure even better outcomes.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and they use this effectively to plan lessons that ensure pupils make consistently good progress. However, some teachers do not consistently challenge the most able pupils so that they can excel. That said, leaders have a strategy in place to ensure that teachers 'demand more' of their pupils, particularly the most able pupils.
- Teachers set homework in line with the school's expectations and policies. Pupils say that they value their homework and that it contributes effectively to their learning and progress.
- Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, highlights that parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of feedback that they receive about their children's progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils are confident and self-assured because of the quality of support that they receive at school. They display good attitudes to learning and take pride in their work.
- The majority of pupils display resilience in their learning, which has a good overall impact on their learning and progress. However, the most able pupils are not consistently challenged to excel. In addition, some of the strategies in place to support disadvantaged pupils have not had enough time to embed to enable these pupils to make the best possible progress.
- There is a strong pastoral team at the school, and pupils' mental health and well-being are key priorities. For example, leaders ensure that pastoral support managers, a listening coach and educational specialists offer effective support and guidance as needed. The school also makes good use of five mental health first aiders and a group of staff who are trained to deliver mindfulness and emotional awareness activities. Pupils value this high-quality support.
- Across the school, pupils say that bullying is rare and that where it is identified, it is dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Pupils have a very strong knowledge of how to stay safe online and in their local community. They understand the importance of staying healthy and fit.
- There is a wide range of leadership opportunities for pupils. For example, pupils can make a significant difference through the pupil parliament, pupil voice opportunities and the variety of leadership roles that enable them to support subjects and leadership departments. Leadership departments include the community, the environment, health and fitness, school improvement, and teaching and learning. Pupils value these opportunities.

- There is an extremely comprehensive programme of impartial careers information, advice and guidance at Ashton-on-Mersey School. The careers adviser targets with precision pupils who may need additional support, for example disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. The provision offered is wide-ranging and effective. The number of pupils who are in sustained education, employment or training post 16 is excellent.
- The school's personal, social, health and economic education programme (character education) is effective. There is a strong focus on building resilience in pupils and the power of learning. Across key stages 3 and 4, pupils focus on mental health and emotional well-being, as well as communicating about themselves, celebrating diversity, challenging stereotypes and celebrating different faiths. Character education is taught through a process of questioning pupils and challenging them to think about key topics.
- Leaders ensure that British values are interwoven with school life. There are several large-scale events that take place, for example the UK Youth Parliament's 'Make your Mark' campaign. This is where pupils help to decide what is debated in the House of Commons. In addition, the key British values themes are effectively addressed through the wider curriculum, social sciences, assemblies and form time.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted at every opportunity. For example, the school has a well-respected lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT plus) group.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Overall, pupils' attendance is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is also below the national average. Attendance rates for pupils with SEND are also good and improving. However, although leaders are taking action to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, too many are regularly absent from school.
- Exclusion rates are below the national average. Leaders rarely exclude pupils because they behave well, respect each other and value their school as a place of learning.
- Pupils feel very safe in this school and they take pride in the school environment. There is absolutely no litter, damage or graffiti to the site. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and they conduct themselves extremely well during breaktimes, lunchtimes and between lessons.
- Pupils who are educated at alternative providers are safe, behave well and are well supported to make good progress in their learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- At Ashton-on-Mersey School pupils attain highly across a wide range of subjects. By the end of key stage 4 in 2018, provisional information shows that the proportion of pupils who achieved a standard and strong pass in GCSE English and mathematics was well above the national average. There is a trajectory of improvement.
- Across a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science, pupils' progress is consistently good over time. Provisional information for 2018 highlights

once again that lower-ability pupils and middle-ability pupils continue to make very strong progress from their starting points.

- The most able pupils make good progress overall. However, some teachers do not routinely challenge the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, so that they excel.
- An increasing number of pupils enter for the English Baccalaureate. Pupils now make consistently good progress across this suite of subjects. For example, since 2016, pupils have made strong improvements in humanities and in modern foreign languages.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress from their starting points. A scrutiny of work across both key stages 3 and 4 confirmed that current pupils with SEND continue to make good progress and, where appropriate, they are catching up with their peers.
- In 2016 and 2017, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils was well below that of other pupils nationally with the same starting points. However, leaders have taken significant and effective action to improve the progress of this group of pupils. For example, provisional information for 2018 shows that disadvantaged pupils made good progress overall and very good progress in English and mathematics. Current disadvantaged pupils continue to catch up apace.
- In 2017, children looked after made weak progress from their starting points. Leaders have taken effective action to improve outcomes for this group of disadvantaged pupils. However, although improving, leaders do not routinely ensure that there is an equally strong focus on academic progress as there is on pastoral support for this group of pupils.
- Across key stages 3 and 4, current pupils make consistently good progress from their starting points. Pupils' work confirms that they develop knowledge well because lessons are well sequenced and well planned. Pupils make particularly good progress in key stage 4 mathematics.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their education, training or employment.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Students make outstanding progress and attain extremely highly in the sixth form. In 2018, provisional information shows that pupils continued to make outstanding progress on their vocational courses, for example business studies, construction and the built environment and sport. In 2018, students' progress and attainment from their starting points on academic A levels were also, once again, very good.
- Disadvantaged students and those with SEND make particularly strong progress in the sixth form. Their progress is well above the national average.
- Students who enter the sixth form without a higher-grade pass in English and/or mathematics are extremely well taught and supported to succeed. Consequently, a much higher than average number of students go on to secure a good pass in both subjects.

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is excellent. Students benefit from passionate teachers with very strong subject knowledge. Assessment processes are rigorous and effective.
- Students speak very highly of the support that they get for any personal issues and for their academic progress right across the sixth form. Typically, sixth-form students said that leaders and teachers are caring, supportive and that they do not let anyone slip below their targets. Students' outcomes are testimony to the quality of this support, advice and guidance.
- The leadership of the sixth form is outstanding. There is a caring ethos and a passion to ensure that students excel. All statutory safeguarding duties are met.
- Students' behaviour and attendance are key strengths. Students look smart and conduct themselves impeccably. They have many excellent opportunities to develop leadership skills throughout their time in the sixth form.
- The proportion of students who complete their courses is well above the national average. In 2018, nearly every student completed their study programme. On the rare occasion where students do leave their course, it is because they have secured an apprenticeship.
- Every student undertakes a well-planned programme of work experience to complement their study programme. They also take part in a wide variety of enrichment opportunities, which include various community activities. These opportunities, together with an effective tutorial programme, work in synergy to develop students' employability skills.
- The quality of information, advice and guidance is outstanding. This ensures that year-on-year all students go on to higher education, further education, employment or apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	138123
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	10058113

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,428
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	121
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Councillor John Lamb
Executive headteacher	Andrew Shakos
Telephone number	0161 973 1179
Website	http://thedeantrust.co.uk/
Email address	office@aom.trafford.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 April 2013

Information about this school

- Ashton-on-Mersey School is larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a small, predominantly vocational sixth form.
- The school is part of the Dean Trust multi-academy trust. The Dean Trust comprises nine schools and academies in both the primary and secondary sectors, across four local authorities. At Ashton-on-Mersey School, the board of trustees is accountable for the school. An executive team supports and advises the trustees. Trustees delegate some powers to the local governing body. The local governing body provides regular reports to the trustees.

- In 2011, the school became a teaching school. It also secured school-centred initial teacher training status (SCITT) in 2014 to provide initial teacher education.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is much higher than that found nationally.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is lower than that found nationally. However, the school has a high number of children looked after on roll.
- There is a higher proportion of boys on roll.
- A small proportion of pupils are educated at alternative providers. The school makes use of: The Trafford Medical Education Service; Trafford High School; Gorse Hill Studios; NT&AS Education and Vision Education.
- From September 2018, leaders took the decision that Ashton-on-Mersey School's sixth form would be a provider of predominantly vocational 16 to 19 study programmes in response to local needs. Several students join the sixth form from other schools in the local area.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out following concerns relating to pupils' outcomes, including the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and children looked after. There were also several complaints made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors followed up concerns about pupils' behaviour, personal development and welfare, safeguarding arrangements, outcomes for pupils and the provision for pupils with SEND.
- This inspection was conducted with notice. However, following wider concerns about the quality of education that the school provides, the inspection was deemed a full section 5 inspection under section 9 of the Education Act.
- Inspectors formally observed teaching in a wide range of lessons across key stages 3, 4 and 5. Shorter learning walks across a series of lessons were undertaken jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors undertook an in-depth analysis of pupils' work in several subjects across the school. This was jointly conducted with either senior leaders or middle leaders. In addition, inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils' work in lessons. Inspectors also reviewed the work of disadvantaged pupils (including children looked after), pupils with SEND, boys and the most able pupils.
- Meetings were held with a trustee, senior leaders, members of the local governing body, subject leaders, the coordinator for special educational needs, other middle leaders, teachers, newly qualified and recently qualified teachers, and pastoral leaders.
- The lead inspector considered one additional complaint from a parent that was received during the inspection.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised by the inspection team, including: safeguarding documentation; the school's own self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; documentation relating to children looked after and pupils with SEND; departmental documentation; records of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; records of ongoing teacher training; minutes of the meetings of the local governing body and trustees; information about how well current pupils are progressing in their learning; analyses of past pupils' performance; and behaviour and attendance records.
- Observations of pupils' behaviour were undertaken during the school day, between lessons, during breaktimes and at lunchtimes. Inspectors met formally with a range of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.
- Inspectors considered the 138 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Jonathan Smart, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Alyson Middlemass	Ofsted Inspector
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Annette Patterson	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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