

Aldridge School - A Science College

Tynings Lane, Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands WS9 0BG

Inspection dates

8–9 February 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	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors know their school and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points in most subjects. Standards are strongest in science.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding well and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving rapidly as a result.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and build confidence in the pupils.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and provide good support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Some teaching is less effective. When this is the case, expectations are not high enough and planning does not meet the needs of all pupils, especially the most able.
- Leaders and managers provide a number of effective professional development opportunities for staff. However, the impact of these is not always evaluated well.
- Pupils are confident and considerate. They are proud of their school.
- Leaders and governors make safeguarding a top priority. All staff understand how to keep pupils safe.
- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average for secondary schools. Leaders' efforts to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils are beginning to yield improvements, but too slowly.
- Behaviour is good because pupils respect each other. Pupils feel safe.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. At key stage 4, the school provides a good range of subjects and qualifications to meet the needs of pupils. A music scholars programme is a real strength of the school.
- Sixth-form students are appreciative of the support they are given. They make good progress in both academic and vocational qualifications.
- Pupils benefit from a comprehensive programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Careers guidance is a particular strength.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make consistently strong progress in all subjects by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan and implement activities that are well matched to pupils' needs
 - have high expectations of the quality and quantity of work that pupils complete in lessons
 - consistently challenge the most able pupils.
- Sharpen leadership by ensuring that leaders check carefully and regularly the impact that their actions to improve teaching and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils are having.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher's effective leadership has created a culture where pupils, parents and staff are proud of their school. He is passionate about providing the best possible education for each pupil.
- Senior leaders, including governors, have a clear ambition for the school. Leaders have a strong strategic focus on issues in the school improvement plan and set ambitious targets. An overwhelming majority of staff and parents who responded to the online questionnaire said that the school is well led and managed. A significant number of parents said that they would recommend the school to another parent. One parent who responded to the Parent View questionnaire said: 'It has been a great school that has allowed my daughter to flourish over her years of attendance. I couldn't recommend this school enough.'
- Leaders and governors have an accurate, evidence-based picture of the school's strengths and areas to improve. They have put in place detailed plans to address weaknesses and these are helping to secure improvement. For example, they have developed and implemented strategies to support disadvantaged pupils to make better progress in lessons.
- Middle leaders, including subject and pastoral leaders, form a supportive team as they successfully focus on the academic progress and personal development of pupils. Assessments are collected five times a year and the information is used to identify individuals and groups of pupils who are falling behind with their work. Teachers and leaders then give extra support to all pupils who need it and this helps them catch up.
- The headteacher and governors have recently restructured the senior leadership team which has brought about a renewed drive to improve attendance, teaching and assessment. Leaders of attendance have put in place actions to support disadvantaged students to attend school more regularly. However, leaders do not check the impact that their actions are having as well as they do in other areas, such as pupils' academic progress.
- Teaching is good and continues to improve. Leaders regularly carry out learning walks in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching. They use this information to identify areas for improvement and to ensure that training is provided accordingly. Teachers value the opportunities for their own professional development. Leaders encourage teachers to take risks and share good practice. Many teachers attend 'tea time tasters' or are members of 'learning communities' where new ideas are discussed and shared. Other opportunities are linked closely to the school's self-evaluation and are aimed at supporting the further development of the school. Occasionally, leaders do not check carefully enough that training is having the desired impact.
- Leaders set teachers annual targets that are clearly focused on raising standards and ensuring that pupils make good academic progress. Newly qualified teachers told inspectors that they value the training, guidance and support that colleagues are providing in their first year in the profession.

- The curriculum provides pupils with an appropriate range of subjects in all years. Leaders evaluate the curriculum and make change when necessary. For example, leaders have recently extended key stage 3 to three years, from Year 7 to Year 9. This additional time in key stage 3 is to allow more time for pupils to make the right choices in their GCSE options. Leaders' decision to provide some pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 with additional 'catch-up' lessons has also resulted in better progress for these pupils. Year 7 catch-up funding is well spent. As pupils move from key stage 3 to key stage 4, they are guided into one of five pathways designed to meet their individual needs. Consequently, pupils in key stage 4 follow courses that are well matched to their ability.
- A broad range of extra-curricular activities supplements the formal, taught curriculum. Leaders keep records of attendance in order to evaluate the impact that enrichment activities are having on groups of pupils. Leaders have noticed that there has recently been a decline in attendance and have recognised the need to ensure that the provision meets the needs of all pupils. A music scholars programme, which offers 25 places per year as part of the school's admissions policy, is a particular strength.
- Weekly personal, social, health and citizenship education lessons, supplemented by assemblies, successfully contribute to several aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. A planned programme helps pupils understand how to stay safe online. Leaders have ensured that the programme prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Pupils spoke very maturely and sensitively about a PSHCE lesson on the threats they might face from extremism.
- External reviews commissioned by leaders have supported the school to make improvements. Leaders acted positively in implementing recommendations from a pupil premium review in 2014. Through a more focused approach as to the use of pupil premium funding, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving.

Governance of the school

- Governors are committed to the school and share a common purpose with its leaders. They know the school well. Some governors act as a link with a senior leader overseeing a key area from the school development plan.
- Governors are knowledgeable. They have a good understanding of externally published information about the school's performance. Governors' scrutiny of the school's work is particularly thorough in the area of pupils' progress and the impact of the pupil premium. For example, they scrutinise progress data, asking challenging questions. In this way, they ensure that additional funding, including the pupil premium and funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is having the maximum impact.
- Governors take advantage of opportunities for training and make use of their expertise in supporting and challenging school leaders. Governors continually self-review in order to improve their own skills.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Leaders and governors are committed to the safety and well-being of all. Employment checks made on staff, volunteers and governors are robust and well recorded. Safeguarding records are detailed, well organised and stored securely.
- Leaders take swift action when safeguarding concerns arise. Regular training ensures that all staff have a strong understanding of the importance of safeguarding.
- Pupils are safe in school and pupils overwhelmingly say that they feel safe. They value the work of pastoral leaders based in 'the hub' who listen to their concerns and take action when necessary.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' online safety is a priority and follow up all concerns rigorously to ensure that pupils are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good and improving. Teachers use their subject expertise and detailed knowledge of what pupils already understand, know and can do, to plan lessons. All teachers are now well informed about individual pupils' starting points and most are using this information to plan activities that are well matched to pupils' ability. However, sometimes teachers do not always match the learning activities to the needs of individual pupils and groups of pupils. When this is the case, the most able pupils do not make rapid progress.
- Relationships are strong. Teachers know their pupils and, in turn, pupils trust their teachers. Pupils support each other in lessons and they are keen and eager to do well. Teachers usually have high expectations. However, sometimes teachers are too accepting of pupils completing too little work, or work of a poor quality.
- In most lessons, teachers skilfully use questioning to help students think about their work and to deepen their understanding. They expect pupils to answer questions with detail and precision.
- The teaching of literacy is targeted and the curriculum has been adapted to give this greater focus. Consequently, pupils' literacy skills are improving. Spellings are a key feature in most subject areas. Extra provision is given in key stage 3 to pupils with low reading ages to help them catch up. Reading is monitored by teaching assistants for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils collaborate effectively in groups. They listen respectfully to each other, they share ideas and support each other. For example, inspectors observed groups of pupils supporting and challenging each other in a mathematics lesson asking of each other high-level questions with good subject-specific vocabulary.
- Teachers are aware of the whole-school focus on providing challenge for pupils, particularly the most able. Pupils told inspectors that they liked to be challenged and in lessons where this was most effective pupils showed greater resilience. For example, in a key stage 3 French lesson, less-able pupils played a game where they could only use the target language. The element of competition ensured that pupils challenged and supported each other. However, teachers do not currently provide consistently high levels of challenge for the most able pupils.
- Teachers use additional adults effectively in supporting pupils who require extra help.

Teaching assistants were clear about their roles and knew the pupils well. Learning profiles clearly identify strategies to use to support specific needs. As a result, the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are typically well mannered and keen to do well. They are smartly dressed and proud of their school. The great majority of pupils were keen to tell inspectors about the school's many strengths including the wide range of opportunities that it provides for pupils.
- The school's curriculum is carefully planned to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe from a range of potential dangers. Pupils are well aware of the dangers posed when using the internet, including the risks that can arise from people with radical views. In a conversation with inspectors, a group of pupils spoke with sensitivity when discussing the threats posed by people with extremist views. The school works in partnership with the local authority to ensure that the community is well informed about the threat of radicalisation. Teachers and a group of pupils have attended 'Prevent' training.
- Bullying is rare in the school and any that does occur is dealt with well. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and that they trust adults to help them with any problems they experience, including bullying.
- An overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire confirmed that their child is well looked after by the school. One parent said: 'My child is well looked after and has been supported brilliantly. My child enjoys going to school and has been given a huge range of opportunities to develop holistically.'
- An effective PSHCE programme has a positive impact on pupils' well-being. A group of pupils spoke with great enthusiasm about an assembly aimed at improving self-confidence. They spoke positively about the impact that this had had on them. One pupil commented: 'This is a school where you can be who you are.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in almost all lessons, at break and lunchtime and as they move around the school. Pupils are friendly, polite and courteous to each other and to adults. Pupils, staff and most parents agree that behaviour in the school is good and well managed.
- The use of fixed-term exclusion is rare. Senior leaders adopted a 'back to basics approach' in 2015/16. This saw a spike in the number of referrals to the internal Alder Centre, a base where pupils receive extra help to improve their attitudes towards

behaviour for learning. Latest figures show that, this year, there are fewer referrals. This is because pupils learn from their mistakes and do not generally repeat poor behaviour.

- Pupils' attitudes to learning are usually excellent. They are eager to learn and they work hard.
- An overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View agree that the school makes sure that pupils are well behaved. Most pupils who spoke to inspectors said that pupils behaved well in lessons.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes have improved and current pupils are making good progress in all years and across most subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Standards at the end of key stage 4 are strongest in health and social care, geography, IT, music, physical education, biology and chemistry. Published data for 2016 shows that pupils' outcomes in English and modern foreign languages were less strong. Leaders are taking effective action to raise standards in these subjects and improvement is evident.
- Over time, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have improved. This is because most teachers make them a priority when planning lessons. The school's own assessment information indicates that 2017 will see continued improvement, but this remains a key priority for the school.
- The school has comparatively low numbers of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although the proportions are increasing in lower years. Outcomes for these pupils have historically been weak. However, leaders' clear focus on improving the achievement of these pupils is, according to the school's assessment information, confirmed by inspection evidence, leading to better progress.
- Outcomes for the most able are good. However, sometimes teachers do not make sure that the learning activities are suitably matched to the needs of individual pupils and groups of pupils. When this is the case, the most able pupils do not make rapid progress.
- Leaders' regular checks on attainment provide a wealth of information about pupils' progress. Leaders, including middle leaders and pastoral leaders, carefully analyse this information to check that all groups of pupils continue to make good progress. School assessment information, alongside inspectors' observations of learning and scrutiny of pupils' work, confirm that the trajectory of improvement across all subjects is good.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leaders are ambitious to see the sixth form continue to improve. Student numbers have grown this year to include a number of students who have joined from other schools. An inclusive entry policy sees students joining the sixth form with a wide range of attainment.
- Senior leaders and governors undertook a review of 16 to 19 provision in March 2015

and have successfully implemented actions in order to achieve their vision for the school's sixth form. More students now stay on into the sixth form at the end of Year 11. Teaching has improved as a result of careful monitoring and personalised professional development for teachers. The enrichment programme continues to be developed to provide a clear and effective programme of health and well-being.

- Achievement in the sixth form is good. This is because there is an effective system of monitoring so that students make good progress. In 2016, achievement was above average in physics and music technology and is at least in line with national averages for most subjects.
- Attendance, punctuality, behaviour and attitudes to learning are all excellent in the sixth form. Students enjoy their studies and apply themselves to their work. They are mature and provide excellent role models to lower year groups.
- All students who join the sixth form without having secured GCSEs in English and mathematics at grades A* to C are expected to study towards improving their grade. Current students have been very successful in this, with almost half achieving the A* to C benchmark in November 2016. The rest are predicted to achieve it by the end of this academic year.
- A broad range of academic and vocational options is offered in the sixth form. Effective careers advice and guidance ensures that students take subjects that are well matched to their ability and aspirations. High-quality support means that most complete the courses they start in Year 12. Equally effective guidance in Years 12 and 13 prepares students well for when they leave school. Consequently, the proportions of students who move on to university, apprenticeship or employment are consistently higher than the national figures. One student has accepted a place at Oxford University for study in September 2017.
- Students are proud of their school. They feel safe, and are safe, in the sixth form. Leaders provide a comprehensive enrichment programme which is monitored carefully to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education and preparation for working life. They know how to live safe and healthy lifestyles because they understand the risks they might otherwise face.
- All requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes are met.

School details

Unique reference number	137974
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10026778

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 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,513
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Will Hodson
Headteacher	David Mountney
Telephone number	01922 743988
Website	www.aldridgeschool.org
Email address	dmountney@aldridgeschool.org
Date of previous inspection	21–22 November 2012

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.
- The school is a much larger than average secondary school. It is presently a single academy trust.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is broadly average but increasing.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disability is much lower than average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress.
- A very small number of pupils attend Walsall College full time. The body of this report does not refer to these pupils, as doing so would risk identifying them.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons and some of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and their attitudes to and opinions about school, including teaching, behaviour and safety. They met with three focus groups of pupils. Inspectors observed pupils at break and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors considered 121 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, including 74 ‘free text’ comments from parents. Inspectors also considered 82 responses to an online staff questionnaire. Inspectors also received one letter from a parent and considered information received in two telephone calls.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, other leaders and newly qualified teachers. The lead inspector met with representatives from the school’s governing body.
- Inspectors scrutinised several documents including the school’s self-evaluation, its development plan, minutes of governing body meetings, external reviews and the school’s records about pupils’ behaviour, attendance and attainment and progress.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school’s policies and procedures related to safeguarding and pupil support and welfare, including child-protection records, attendance procedures and risk assessments.

Inspection team

Richard Gill, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Herminder Channa	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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