

Inspection of a good school: Aldridge School - A Science College

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

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 May 2022

Outcome

Aldridge School - A Science College continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school, including those in the sixth form, enjoy their learning. They say that their teachers care about them and help them to do their best. Classrooms are calm and purposeful spaces that encourage and promote learning. Teachers have high expectations of how and what pupils will learn. Pupils rise to this challenge.

Pupils value the opportunities provided to broaden their experiences. Those in the sixth form enjoy supporting younger pupils to achieve their best. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said how much they appreciated how quickly leaders have reinstated educational visits and extra-curricular clubs, despite the long-lasting impact of the pandemic in this area of the country.

Nearly all pupils say that they feel safe and happy. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online and in the community. They are very confident that if they have a problem there will always be someone to talk to and they will always receive help. Pupils are well-versed in fundamental British values. They are nearly always kind, respectful and tolerant of each other. As a result, they say that there is very little bullying. When it does happen, staff deal with it quickly and effectively.

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

Leaders have designed and implemented an ambitious curriculum. It provides every pupil with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to make a success of their lives. It is well sequenced and enables pupils to build on their prior learning to progress towards clear end points. The mantra here is to 'teach to the top'. Teachers adapt learning effectively for those pupils who may struggle, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is helping to improve the progress made by the weakest learners. However, occasionally, the support strategies do not ensure that these pupils can learn more and remember more of what has been taught.

Leaders quickly identify the needs of pupils with SEND. They have developed and implemented effective support to make sure those needs are consistently met. For instance, keyworkers allocated to those with an education, health and care plan provide a high level of support. They meet regularly with pupils and check their progress every week. As a result, leaders quickly identify pupils who are not keeping up with their classmates and put strategies in place to help them catch up. Regular 'assess, plan, do, review' meetings ensure that plans are appropriately adapted.

Teachers check pupils' learning effectively. They use questions skilfully to spot and address pupils' misunderstandings or misconceptions. Staff adjust and modify the curriculum as necessary when they identify any gaps in pupils' learning.

Pupils from Year 8 onwards get good careers advice. Visits to Oxford University and Walsall College have helped pupils to make decisions about their futures. Approximately half of Year 11 leavers choose to remain in the sixth form. This is because they have access to a very broad range of A-level and vocational qualifications that they can study at any of the schools in the trust. Post-16 study programmes are carefully constructed. Students contribute to their local community as well as to school life; for instance, supporting those who struggle with reading and organising school events.

Reading is an important part of the learning culture. Leaders plan and provide a wide range of activities for all year groups to promote the love of reading. Pupils enjoy reading and enjoy the rewards that reading in and out of school bring them. A rigorous approach to improving reading is in place. A range of programmes helps pupils improve their reading fluency and comprehension. However, leaders have not established a suitable phonics programme for the small number of pupils who are at a very early stage of reading.

Behaviour around the school and in lessons is nearly always good. Leaders have high expectations and these are applied consistently. Low level disruption in lessons is infrequent. When it does occur, teachers follow the agreed behaviour policy. The reward system is understood, used effectively by teachers and valued by pupils.

Pupils, including those in the sixth form, have many opportunities to develop their confidence, independence and understanding of the wider world. Leaders have organised visits from different faith and community groups, the police, fire and rescue services, local charities and the army that are delivered through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. Pupils regularly work alongside organisations, including the Brindley Foundation, to address a different community topic each term. For instance, pupils have been involved in devising a knife crime awareness campaign and in developing a garden of remembrance.

Trustees have a clear and accurate view of the school. They have put systems in place to support an effective approach to developing a culture of achievement. For instance, the local governing board offers the school both support and challenge. In turn, they are held to account by the trust which maintains close oversight of progress towards agreed improvements.

Most staff are very positive about the support they receive from leaders. They say that leaders care about their well-being and provide help when they need it.

Most of the parents are supportive of the school. However, some parents do not feel that they always get the right information at the right time.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Rigorous systems are in place to keep pupils safe, including checking that staff are safe to work with young people. Staff are well-trained and know what to do should they have concerns, no matter how small. Consequently, pupils who are at risk of harm are identified quickly.

Leaders work with a range of external agencies so that pupils get the right help at the right time. Pupils learn how to recognise risks and to keep themselves safe. Leaders are aware of risks in the local community and make sure that pupils know how to protect themselves from those risks.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The reading support curriculum does not include a systematic synthetic approach to teaching phonics. As a result, the small number of pupils at a very early stage of reading do not yet have appropriate support. Leaders should ensure that provision for these pupils includes a suitable phonics programme and that those delivering the programme have the relevant training and expertise.
- Occasionally, teachers do not implement the curriculum in the best way to support some pupils' learning. This limits the progress a small number of pupils make. Leaders should make sure that the curriculum is delivered in a way that best meets pupils' needs and abilities.
- A few parents say that leaders do not provide the right information at the right time. Leaders should continue to improve and develop the ways in which they provide information for and communicate with parents.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged Aldridge School - A Science College, to be good in February 2017.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

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.

School details

Unique reference number	137974
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10211414
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1584
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	260
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kevin Davis
Headteacher	Ian Bryant
Website	www.aldrigedschool.org
Date of previous inspection	8 and 9 February 2017

Information about this school

- Aldridge School - A Science College converted to become an academy in 2012. It joined The Mercian Trust in January 2018. When its predecessor school, Aldridge School - A Science College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- Aldridge School - A Science College is an academy within The Mercian Trust.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector held a meeting with the chief executive officer and the executive director of education; with four trustees; and with the chair and members of the local governing body.

- Deep dives in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and geography were completed. These included discussions with subject leaders and teachers, visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work. Inspectors also met with pupils to discuss their learning in these subjects and listened to pupils read.
- The lead inspector reviewed the PSHE curriculum plan, spoke with the curriculum leader and visited an assembly. The lead inspector also reviewed the support provided for pupils at an early stage of reading.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including leaders' plans to improve the school and their self-evaluation of the school's work. Minutes of local governing body, and trust member meetings were also reviewed.
- When inspecting safeguarding, the inspector considered the school's procedures for keeping pupils safe, the checks made to ensure safe recruitment and the quality of staff training.

Inspection team

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