

# Darwen Aldridge Community Academy

Sudell Road, Darwen, BB3 3HD

**Inspection dates** 16–17 January 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The academy is increasingly effective in making a difference to students' aspirations and life chances. Strong principles, based on the academy's specialist areas of entrepreneurship and sport, influence teaching, learning and the provision well. As a result, most students develop positive attitudes towards their studies and futures as they move through the academy. Many make the most of the outstanding range of additional academic, entrepreneurial, sporting and cultural opportunities provided.
- Students feel safe and secure in the academy. Behaviour is good and students respect the building, staff and each other.
- Students' attainment and progress in their learning have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Most students make good progress from their starting points, including in English and mathematics.
- The sixth form is good. Academic achievement has improved a great deal since the previous inspection. The curriculum meets students' needs very well indeed. The good number of 'sporting academies' established within the sixth form provide talented students with excellent opportunities for academic and sporting success.
- Teaching is good and supports students' good progress across a range of subjects. It is especially strong in the sixth form.
- The Principal, leaders and the governing body set high expectations of staff and students. They have successfully improved teaching and students' achievement since the previous inspection.
- The work of the academy is supported exceptionally well by the sponsor and the Darwen Academy Trust.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small proportion of teaching requires improvement and not enough is outstanding to enable students to make outstanding progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 43 lessons. Two were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with leaders, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and the chief executive of the sponsor, The Aldridge Foundation which is also a member of the Darwen Academy Trust. A telephone conversation was held with Sir Rod Aldridge, OBE, the original sponsor of the academy.
- Inspectors held discussions with groups of students from each year group.
- The views of 45 parents were taken into account through the Ofsted on-line survey, (Parent View) and a very small number of electronic messages received after the inspection.

## Inspection team

Gillian Salter-Smith, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Patrick Feerick	Additional Inspector
Jonathan Woodyatt	Additional Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The academy opened in September 2008 and moved into a new building on a new site close to the town centre in September 2010. A Personalised Learning Centre, housed in a building adjacent to the school, was opened in January 2011.
- The academy's sponsor is the Aldridge Foundation, founded by Sir Rod Aldridge, OBE. The academy is part of the Darwen Academy Trust which works in partnership with the Aldridge Foundation to support the academy. The academy is part of the Aldridge Family of Academies which comprises a number of academies in different parts of the country.
- The academy specialises in providing for entrepreneurship and sport.
- A number of sporting academies is established in the sixth form. These provide talented students with opportunities for specialist coaching in specific sports alongside academic study. Sporting academies include those for football and cricket. Plans are advanced for academies for table tennis, netball and golf.
- The academy is average in size compared with other secondary schools/academies.
- The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium funding is above average. (Pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government to support students known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and the children of service families.)
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds. A very small proportion of students is from minority ethnic backgrounds and of these a few speak English as an additional language.
- More students than is found in most schools join and leave the academy at times other than the usual start and leaving points.
- Courses are provided away from the academy site for a small number of students at Fernhurst School and at St Thomas's Pupil Referral Unit.
- Many students study GCSE courses from Year 9 onwards. The Academy enters students for GCSE examinations when they consider they are ready to be successful, and this can be before the end of Year 11.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards. These set the minimum standards expected for students' attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of some features of teaching so that more teaching is outstanding and that it is all at least good by:
  - ensuring that in all lessons tasks set match students' different abilities so that they all can do their best, including the more-able students
  - giving students more chances to find things out for themselves, share ideas and communicate more confidently with each other so that they are more active in their learning in lessons
  - making sure that the advice and guidance that teachers give to students is always helpful and that students are always expected to improve their work in response to teachers' suggestions
  - ensuring that students' literacy and numeracy skills are promoted consistently well in all subjects.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment and progress have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Students make good progress from below-average starting points. They have especially weak skills in literacy and numeracy. In 2012 the proportion gaining five or more C grades or higher in GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, was in line with the national average. Students currently in Year 11 are set to exceed challenging targets for attainment and progress, including in English and mathematics.
- The academy encourages students to study GCSE courses from Year 9 and they enter examinations before the age of 16 in a number of subjects, including in mathematics. The policy encourages students to reach their full potential and does not restrict them from achieving the higher grades. The proportion of students gaining the highest A\* to A grades is set to improve in 2013.
- Students make good overall progress in improving their literacy and numeracy skills. Those who fall behind receive good support that helps them to catch up. In many lessons students develop good communication skills and confidently discuss their ideas in pairs and with the whole class; this is not the case in all lessons.
- The academy does a great deal to encourage equality of opportunity and ensure that all students, whatever their background or needs, achieve well. Disabled students, those with special educational needs, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress in line with that of their peers. Students from a Pakistani background made especially good progress in 2012.
- Pupil premium funding is spent effectively on additional academic and personal support for these students and enhancement of their curriculum experiences. The gap in the performance of students eligible for free school meals and those who are not is getting smaller year on year. In 2012, these students made especially good progress in mathematics. Those students who join the academy at times other than the usual start in Year 7 make good progress; in particular, those who have fallen behind in their learning are supported well by staff who help them to catch up.
- The small number of students who take part in alternative provision held off the academy site achieve well. They improve their basic skills and achieve a range of qualifications that prepare them well for their future lives. The proportion of students who do not go on to education, training or employment is low.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form is good. Attainment and progress in AS and A-Level examinations are improving year on year. This is because they receive good guidance on the courses that suit their needs and the teaching is at least good. Students' progress, from starting points that are often below those of most sixth-form students, is good. Attainment in AS and A-Level courses is broadly in line with national averages for A\* to E grades and stronger for AS than A-Level.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching is resulting in students' good progress and improved achievement since the previous inspection. Some outstanding teaching is found in all key stages but it is mostly in the sixth form and in Key Stage 4.
- In most lessons, relationships between staff and students are positive and supportive. A good atmosphere that encourages learning is well-established in most classrooms.
- In outstanding teaching, teachers expect a very great deal of students. Teachers constantly check how well students are learning through their astute questions and observations. They guide students' learning and adjust tasks so that students make very rapid gains in their learning.

- In good teaching, staff plan tasks that get the most out of the students, whatever their abilities. Well-structured lessons include a good variety of different ways of learning. Staff expect much of students and encourage them to use their own initiative. Students are encouraged to organise their own time and learning, find things out for themselves, discuss their work in pairs, and present their work to the class. As a result, students enjoy learning, become more self-reliant and committed to their studies and their confidence as communicators improves.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. They give clear explanations, recognise how students are thinking and their questioning is skilled in checking understanding and developing students' deeper thinking.
- Staff assess students' progress regularly and accurately. They use this information to plan lessons so that gaps in students' learning are filled. This was clearly evident when Year 11 students carried out a series of imaginative tasks planned to revise and consolidate areas of weakness identified in the most recent assessments. Students work towards challenging targets and teachers' marking usually identifies what they need to do to improve.
- Regular assessment leads to staff identifying quickly when students are falling behind. Additional effective support either in class or out of school hours helps these students to catch up. Extra adults support individual students well, developing their confidence and independence alongside providing direct support.
- In the small amount of teaching that requires improvement teachers do not always match tasks well to students' different abilities. As a result, in these lessons students, including the more-able, do not always do as well as they could. Students do not get chances to find things out for themselves, share ideas, communicate with each other about their work and be more active in their learning in lessons. The advice and guidance that teachers give to students is not always helpful and students are not always expected to improve their work in response to teachers' suggestions.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Students respond well to the academy's encouragement and high expectations and as they move through the academy they are increasingly well-motivated. In response to the good teaching and curriculum, they develop more of the attributes that underpin the philosophy of the academy; passion, creativity, team-working, problem-solving, determination and risk-taking. Some sixth-form students have displayed all of these attributes in establishing small and successful businesses.
- Students' attendance is above average and has improved steadily since the previous inspection. Many students are keen to attend extra sessions to support their learning. Students, including those in the sixth form, are very appreciative of the support they receive from staff to help them to do well.
- Behaviour is good, disruptions to lessons are uncommon and behaviour is managed well in most lessons. Students relate and co-operate well with each other showing respect for their peers and adults. Most students display mature attitudes and behaviour when moving around the academy, including in the dining area, which is orderly and well-managed. There have been no exclusions since the academy opened.
- Students say that there is very little bullying. They know what to do should it occur and they have confidence in the staff and know that difficulties will be resolved quickly. They know about different types of bullying.
- Students know how to keep themselves safe in many different situations, including when using modern technology.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The Principal is highly ambitious for the academy and, together with a very strong senior leadership team, has brought about significant improvement in achievement and the quality of

teaching since the previous inspection. The focus and drive are very clearly on improving the life-chances of every student, whatever their circumstances, so that they can make a difference not only to their own lives but to the community in which they live.

- The Aldridge Foundation and the Darwen Academy Trust keep a close and watchful eye on performance and set high expectations. They provide effective external support that leads to improvement, for example in mathematics. Senior staff especially benefit from sharing expertise among the family of Aldridge academies.
- Checks on students' performance and on the quality of teaching by senior and subject leaders are rigorous and accurate. They help to inform academy improvement planning so that the academy has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas of priority.
- Teaching is led and managed well. Staff performance is checked closely and staff are held to account for the effect their teaching has on students' progress. Staff training is focused well on the academy priorities and is appreciated by staff. It is effective in improving teaching so that students are increasingly successful.
- Good leadership of the sixth form has led to improved achievement. Students receive good guidance on their choice of courses so that they are more successful in their chosen courses. An outstanding range of sporting academies provides opportunities for sporting and academic achievement.
- The curriculum meets students' needs well. Students study for GCSE examinations from Year 9 helping to increase commitment to their studies. A good balance of academic courses and vocational courses is encouraged. An excellent range of additional activities gives students opportunities to develop skills and confidence in a wide range of cultural, sporting and entrepreneurial activities. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed well overall so that students are well-prepared for the next stage of education or training. The academy is aware that these skills are not promoted consistently well in all subjects and is taking action to improve this aspect. The Personalised Learning Centre supports individual students well, providing guidance and academic support effectively.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Alternative courses held off the academy site are checked closely to ensure that students are kept safe.
- Staff work effectively with parents to help them to support their children's learning. High-quality care and support are provided for students and their families who face difficulties in their lives.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Strong governance sets high expectations of staff and leaders. Governors bring a wide range of experience and expertise to their role. They are well-informed about the data on the performance of the academy in relation to the national picture and hold the Principal and staff closely to account for students' performance. They are aware of the quality of teaching within the academy and have supported the use of the appraisal system to reward effective teaching. They fully support leaders in tackling ineffective teaching. Governors know how pupil premium funding is spent and are well aware of its effect on students' progress.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135580
<b>Local authority</b>	Blackburn with Darwen
<b>Inspection number</b>	406607

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,078
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	177
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jackie Potter
<b>Principal</b>	Brendan Loughran
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 January 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01254 819500
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<b>Email address</b>	info@daca.uk.com



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