

Alsager School

Hassall Road, Alsager, Stoke-on-Trent ST7 2HR

Inspection dates 2–3 February 2016

Overall effectiveness **Outstanding**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher inspires and empowers his staff and pupils to realise their potential. He has the highest expectations of everyone within the school community, and leads with both rigour and humanity.
- Outstanding leadership at all levels is a hallmark of the school. The headteacher is ably supported by a very strong team of senior leaders. Effective leadership from middle leaders means that subject areas are well-run and high-achieving.
- The successes the school achieves are the result of a team effort. There is a very strong sense of collective responsibility. Pride in the school is shared by staff, governors, pupils and their families.
- Governors are highly committed and know the school well. Members of the governing body bring a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge, which enables them to help drive further improvements in the school.
- The relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and built on mutual respect. This creates an environment where students feel happy, valued and confident, and in which outstanding learning takes place.
- The work that the school does to keep its pupils safe is exemplary. The welfare and personal development of pupils is a very high priority for all staff.
- The very high quality of teaching leads to pupils making outstanding progress. Teachers and support staff ensure that all pupils' needs are met, to enable them to learn effectively.
- Outcomes for pupils are excellent. Pupils make extremely good progress in a wide range of subjects, whatever their circumstances.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs make at least the same rate of progress as their peers.
- Excellent behaviour in classrooms and around the school means that pupils get on very well together. They are courteous and friendly towards one another, staff and visitors.
- This is a self-improving school. Leaders are very reflective. They are quick to identify any areas of underperformance and deal with these effectively.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of every pupil to enable them to make the best possible progress. Pupils benefit from a varied range of enrichment opportunities.
- Leaders know that the sixth form is not yet outstanding, and they have a clear action plan to quickly bring this area of the school in line with the rest. Learners benefit from good quality provision, enabling them to make good progress and develop into mature young men and women. The sixth form is very well led.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of 16 to 19 study programmes further by:
 - ensuring that learners make the best possible progress in all subjects
 - strengthening the way learners participate in work experience
 - encouraging learners to be more aspirational in their higher education choices.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher is a quietly inspirational leader. He has the highest expectations of all his staff and pupils. Over the last three years, his outstanding leadership has enabled the school to move up to the next level from the good judgement it had been given before converting to academy status. Particularly impressive is the way he has taken the whole school community with him on this journey. His rigour is blended with humanity, which means that pupils and staff feel valued and they are proud of their school community and its achievements. This is a truly cohesive school where everyone shares the same values.
- The headteacher has achieved something very special in the level of support he has from his staff and how positive they feel about the culture of the school. There was an overwhelmingly positive response in the staff online survey, with several staff commenting on how much they enjoyed working at Alsager. Staff spoken to during the inspection said how valued and supported they feel. They appreciate that leaders listen to their views. Newly qualified teachers are unanimous in their praise for the support they receive. They are very appreciative of the time that leaders and their colleagues devote to both their professional and personal development.
- Outstanding leadership at all levels is at the heart of this school's success. The headteacher is very ably supported by an extremely strong team of senior leaders. Highly effective academic and pastoral middle leadership contributes significantly to the excellent progress that pupils make. All staff are empowered to lead their own areas of responsibility effectively. From Year 7 onwards, pupils are given real leadership responsibilities. For example, in Year 9, the anti-bullying ambassadors have been involved in writing the anti-bullying policy alongside the deputy headteacher.
- The headteacher and governors know the importance of effective succession planning. They focus constantly on building leadership capacity at all levels within the school, which means that senior and middle leadership teams are very strong.
- Leaders at all levels are very reflective. They are quick to identify any areas of underperformance and deal with these effectively. The school's view of its own performance is robust and accurate. The overarching vision of the school improvement plan for the next two years is 'to continually improve our culture of respect and high achievement for all through a consistent approach'. The plan outlines clearly how this will happen and how actions will be evaluated.
- Subject faculties are well led. Faculty leaders know the important part they play in securing strong outcomes for pupils and take this responsibility very seriously. Confident in their leadership qualities, the headteacher gives them the autonomy to run their faculties in the best way to enable pupils to be successful. This takes place in a context of robust monitoring systems and procedures to ensure consistently high expectations.
- There is an ongoing commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning further by harnessing the expertise of staff and sharing this outstanding practice. This aspect of the school's work is led very effectively. Senior leaders have an accurate grasp of teachers' strengths and areas for development. Individual mentoring and training leads to teachers improving their practice. Teachers are highly involved in their own professional development.
- Performance management procedures are used very well to reward success and support improvement. Arrangements for teachers' performance management are extremely thorough and robust. The teachers' standards are at the heart of the process. There is clear evidence that the headteacher and governors use this process very effectively to determine teachers' salary progression.
- Leaders ensure that all pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, which meets their individual needs and helps them to be successful. They monitor carefully to check that this is happening and make adjustments as required. The curriculum at Alsager is as much about the development of pupils' character, values and skills as it is their academic achievement. The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, alongside preparing pupils to be successful citizens in modern Britain, is at the heart of the school's culture. Much of this happens through the co-operative learning programme, an hourly session for all pupils once a week, and the extensive enrichment programme. Participation rates in the wide range of extra-curricular activities are very high.
- Senior leaders are determined that disadvantaged pupils should achieve as well as their peers. They have used the pupil premium funding effectively to ensure that these pupils make excellent progress during their time in school. This is testament to the philosophy of the school, which has equality of opportunity

at its heart.

- The vast majority of parents are extremely positive about the school. Leaders gather their views at every parents' evening. The last three years of these surveys show an overwhelmingly positive picture, with an improving trend of satisfaction. This is echoed in the results of the online Parent View survey. Senior leaders are keen to listen to parents' views. For example, before changing the way they report to parents on their child's progress, they consulted with them about how they would prefer this to happen.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The work the school does to keep its pupils safe is exemplary. Leadership of this area is very strong. Staff engage very effectively and appropriately with parents, carers and other stakeholders to make sure that all pupils are supported and safe. Procedures to ensure that all staff receive relevant training are strong as are the protocols and practices for record-keeping. Staff have received a range of training on potential areas of risk for young people, including radicalisation and extremism. Following Prevent training, staff are confident about making referrals as appropriate.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The school benefits from very strong governance. Governors are highly skilled, well informed and insightful. Governors are acutely aware of the school's strengths and priorities, and offer both support and challenge to secure further improvements. They are very reflective about their own practice. For example, they have made recent changes to how the pupil progress committee operates in order to become more effective. As one governor explained, 'We can now challenge in a far more incisive way.'

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Pupils benefit from very high quality teaching, which enables them to make outstanding progress. Teachers and support staff know their individual pupils well, which means they are able to respond to, and anticipate their needs. This enables the pupils to learn more effectively.
- There are very strong relationships between staff and pupils based on mutual respect. This creates a positive environment where pupils feel valued and confident, and in which outstanding learning takes place. Pupils respond positively when their teachers encourage them to take risks and challenge themselves. They value the support that they get from their teachers and other adults.
- There are high expectations of pupils, and they respond accordingly, producing a high standard of work. Teachers use skilful questioning to probe pupils' understanding and deepen their thinking and reasoning. Across the school, inspectors observed teachers using their expertise and passion for their subjects to engage and enthuse pupils in their learning. In mathematics, for example, consistently high quality teaching enables pupils to feel secure in their understanding and apply their learning confidently to tackle more challenging tasks. One pupil explained this succinctly, saying, 'Miss makes maths easy to understand.'
- There are effective and consistent methods of assessment across all subjects that pupils understand clearly. Pupils know the levels they are working at, and, more importantly, what they need to do to make further progress. In the vast majority of cases, pupils receive high-quality written feedback. The marking of pupils' work in English is particularly strong. Teachers in this subject give very clear targets for improvement and there is evidence in books that pupils respond to these well.
- A strong literacy and oracy culture has been developed across the school. A high priority is given to developing pupils' love of reading for pleasure. Pupils in Key Stage 3 have a reading session in the library every fortnight. Pupils value their time in the calm environment of the well-stocked library, where they clearly enjoy immersing themselves in their books. Pupils keep a reading log and their class teacher tracks their reading development, offering suggestions to broaden their reading horizons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The cooperative values that inform all aspects of school life create an inclusive and harmonious community. Pupils enjoy each other's company and that of other adults in the school.
- The welfare and personal development of pupils is the very essence of this school. All staff take their

responsibilities in this area very seriously, whether in the cooperative learning lessons and form periods, or simply in their daily interactions with their pupils. Opportunities abound both within and outside of the curriculum for pupils to develop and widen their skills and qualities.

- A culture of respect is tangible in this school. It is evident in the way that all members of the school community interact with one another. Consequently, incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils spoken to during the inspection feel that on the few occasions where it does occur, it is handled well.
- Pupils and staff feel that the school is a safe and accepting place to be open about one's sexuality and that people are respected for who they are. However, leaders are aware that there is more work to be done to eradicate the casual use of homophobic language.
- When pupils attend alternative provision, robust procedures and effective communication ensure that their welfare is given the highest priority.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils behave extremely well in all areas of the school. They are courteous and welcoming. Pupils relate to each other, staff and visitors in a respectful, kind and friendly manner. These habits of good behaviour have clearly been developed over time and represent what is typical in this school. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. In many lessons observed during the inspection, they were showing genuine engagement and real enthusiasm. Inspectors also saw many examples of pupils' willingness to help each other in a truly cooperative way.
- Pupils want to attend school and benefit from this very positive learning environment. It is therefore not surprising that the overall absence and persistent absence figures are well below national averages. Leaders have taken swift and effective action to reduce the number of disadvantaged pupils who do not attend school regularly. These actions have had significant impact even within the short timescale of one term. Leaders know exactly why a small number of pupils are not attending school regularly and have created a personalised package of support for each of them. The number of pupils who receive a fixed-term exclusion is very low.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- For the last two years, by the end of Key Stage 4, pupils have made particularly strong progress when compared to the national average. In 2015, the proportion of pupils who made expected and better than expected progress in English and mathematics was significantly above national figures. They also made significantly better progress than the national average in science and languages.
- Over recent years, the proportion of pupils who have attained five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been significantly above the national average. Pupils achieve high standards across a wide range of subject areas.
- Disadvantaged pupils make the same or better progress than their peers nationally and in school. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is a high priority at all levels of the school, from classroom teachers through to governors.
- Pupils who have special educational needs make strong progress in line with their peers. This is because they benefit from personalised provision that meets their specific needs. Ensuring that these pupils do well is a high priority for senior leaders. These pupils have a high profile in school. For example, whenever senior leaders are carrying out learning walks or work scrutinies, the progress of pupils who have special educational needs is always a key focus. Pupils are supported very effectively in their transition from primary school and when they progress to post-16 education.
- The most-able pupils benefit enormously from the culture of high expectations and challenge and make excellent progress. In 2015, a high proportion of pupils attained the best possible GCSE grades in mathematics, English literature, French, drama, media studies and business studies.
- Pupils who arrive at the school with low prior attainment make strong progress as a result of appropriate support and provision. Those supported by the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium make accelerated progress during the early stages of their secondary education.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision for one day a week are following accredited courses that lead to qualifications which are appropriate for their ability. Their progress on the courses is tracked rigorously, and feedback and reports are provided in line with the school's systems. Pupils achieve extremely well on these courses. The pupils who attend college are very positive about their experiences. They told inspectors how it has helped to develop their confidence, so much so that some are now planning on

applying for post-16 courses, which had not previously been the case. Parental feedback is also very positive.

- Year 11 destination information indicates that pupils are being very effectively prepared to progress to the next stage of their education or training. Many pupils choose to continue their studies in the sixth form. Alongside a curriculum which meets their needs, pupils receive very effective careers education, information, advice and guidance.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The sixth form is very well led. During their time in the sixth form, learners are provided with a range of opportunities that enable them to develop into mature and accomplished young men and women. Learners value the education and support they receive. They speak very positively about their teachers.
- Senior leaders accurately evaluate the effectiveness of 16 to 19 study programmes to be good. They have a clear action plan to bring this area of the school in line with the rest and become outstanding as soon as possible. Effective leadership has already produced significant improvements. For example, the school now offers a broader range of study programmes to meet the needs of a wider range of learners. All Year 11 pupils are now guaranteed a place in the sixth form on an appropriate and personalised pathway.
- Learners benefit from the same high-quality teaching that is seen at Key Stages 3 and 4. They make progress on academic and vocational advanced level courses that is broadly in line with the national average. Senior leaders are sharply focused on further improving the progress and attainment of learners to above the national average in all subject areas. Vulnerable learners are supported very effectively. Consequently, they make very good progress and their outcomes at the end of Year 13 enable them to progress to higher education.
- All learners who have not attained a grade C in English or mathematics receive appropriate teaching and support. The success rates when learners re-take these examinations are significantly above national figures.
- Learners benefit from a comprehensive programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance, which enables them to progress to higher education, training or full-time employment after leaving the sixth form. Many learners take up university places, 38% of which were at Russell Group universities in 2014. However, this figure had fallen to 23% in 2015. Leaders acknowledge the need to work further with learners and parents to promote a stronger culture of ambition and aspiration when making university choices.
- All learners have the opportunity to take part in work experience during their two years in the sixth form. Leaders agree that this needs to be offered in a more coherent way. Plans to do this are at an early stage.

School details

Unique reference number	140108
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10011075

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,323
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Allan Ward
Headteacher	Richard Middlebrook
Telephone number	01270 871100
Website	www.alsagerschool.org
Email address	admin@alsagerschool.org
Date of previous inspection	6–7 February 2013

Information about this school

- Alsager School is a larger than average secondary school. It converted to academy status in September 2013.
- Alsager School is part of a Co-operative Foundation Trust with five partner primary schools.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and, therefore, supported with additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, is lower than the national average. The pupil premium is funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and for looked after children.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is lower than the national average.
- Some pupils in Years 10 and 11 participate in courses offered by Reaseheath College and Changing Education.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons across a range of subjects, including joint observations with senior leaders. They carried out a work scrutiny jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with two groups of pupils and talked to others informally during breaks and lunchtimes. Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders, classroom teachers, newly qualified teachers, and learning support assistants. A meeting was held with four members of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 168 responses to the online Parent View survey, the 79 online questionnaires completed by staff and the 185 online questionnaires completed by pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan; performance information; and a selection of policies.

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