

Blackpool Aspire Academy

Blackpool Old Road, Blackpool, Lancashire FY3 7LS

Inspection dates

13–14 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make enough good progress from their various starting points. In 2015 and 2016, pupils' progress was significantly below the national average.
- Disadvantaged pupils and the most able do not achieve well enough across a range of subjects.
- Leaders' use of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils has not yet secured rapid enough improvement in the outcomes for this group of pupils.
- Pupils who did not meet the national standard in English and/or mathematics at the end of key stage 2 do not make enough progress in their first term in Year 7 to help them catch up with their peers.
- The school's recently introduced assessment system tracks progress against targets that are too broad. As a result, it is difficult for teachers to assess whether a pupil is underperforming.
- There are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in mathematics.
- Teachers' planning and feedback do not consistently stretch and challenge pupils to secure the knowledge and skills they need to be successful at the end of key stage 4.
- Attendance, although improving since the school's opening, is not high enough. A few pupils disrupt the learning of others on occasions.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders, managers and governors have improved the culture and ethos since the school's opening. This is a school that continues to improve.
- Most pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards their learning have improved markedly since the school's opening.
- Pupils feel safe in the school, and there are very strong systems in place to ensure that they are kept safe.
- Personal development and welfare are good. Vulnerable pupils are very well cared for.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils value each other's views and show consideration towards their peers.
- The school's reading strategy is fostering a love of reading among pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eradicate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers:
 - use more precise targets and assessment information to plan learning that stretches and challenges pupils, particularly the disadvantaged and the most able
 - provide pupils with feedback that enables them to improve their work
 - intervene swiftly when a pupil is underperforming, particularly in mathematics but also in other subjects
 - check pupils' learning during lessons and tackle misconceptions quickly
 - have higher expectations for Year 7 pupils who have achieved standards below the national expectation in English and/or mathematics so that they catch up more quickly
 - share the most effective practice that exists across the school, for example in geography and English.
- Improve progress quickly across subjects and year groups in order to raise standards by ensuring that leaders, governors and the trust evaluate the effectiveness of the new assessment system on identifying underachievement.
- Continue to engage with parents of those pupils whose attendance is less than others, so that their attendance improves to average and they benefit from the opportunities the school offers.
- Improve the behaviour of those pupils who have yet to respond consistently well to the school's high expectations.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should also be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because leaders have not yet secured consistently good enough teaching to address the legacy of underperformance. As a result, GCSE outcomes, although showing signs of improvement, have been low since the school opened.
- Leaders are not yet securing rapid enough progress for disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able. Leaders use a proportion of the pupil premium funding that they receive for catch-up lessons and small-group support. While this use of the funding has made some difference to the achievement of these pupils, they are not yet achieving well enough.
- The additional funding to help pupils who are behind others in their English and/or mathematics at the start of Year 7 to catch up is not used sufficiently well to accelerate progress in their first term. As a result, not enough pupils catch up with their peers by the start of the spring term.
- Attendance, while improving since the school opened, remains below the national average. Leaders are developing strategies to tackle persistent absence and there are signs of improvement.
- The executive principal and principal have a clear vision for the school that is shared by teachers, pupils and parents. They have led the school diligently and have driven improvements in the ethos and culture of the school. Under their leadership, with support from the trust and governors, they have successfully merged two previously failing schools and have started from scratch to rebuild a more successful community. The school's motto 'success, nothing less' drives the school's work.
- Teachers are held to account for the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make in their classes. Leaders make good use of information from regular checks on teaching and learning to develop teachers' skills and improve teaching. Teachers are held to account for their performance.
- Leaders have a clear recruitment and retention strategy to ensure that pupils receive more consistently high-quality teaching. Leaders have attracted a number of teachers who are new to the profession. These teachers are well supported and appreciate the mentoring they receive. Senior and middle leadership is improving as a result of the school's investment in the professional development of leaders at all levels.
- The school has made great gains in the personal development and welfare of pupils since opening. Leaders have successfully tackled a number of weaknesses that were a legacy from the poor performance of the previous schools. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Most parents and pupils say that the school has improved. They especially value the work of leaders over the last two years to increase the level of expectation, particularly in improving behaviour.
- The leadership team is energetic and keen to drive improvements. Leaders recognise the need to raise standards and improve outcomes more quickly so that pupils achieve at least in line with their peers nationally. They have a strong ambition to become a

good school, and this is shared by governors and the trust.

- Leaders have improved the curriculum and it is now broad and balanced. They have taken action to improve underperforming subjects and created a curriculum that now meets the needs of pupils and enables them to be better prepared for the next stage in their education, employment or training.
- Pupils benefit from extra-curricular activities after school, such as The Aspire Gospel Choir; explorers' club; Fairtrade club; Duke of Edinburgh's Award; Highfurlong air club and a range of sporting activities. GCSE pupils have the opportunity to attend intervention classes to help them catch up on lost learning. Pupils say that they value the weekly homework club and are keen to attend this type of provision more frequently.
- The newly appointed leader for special educational needs is beginning to improve the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. He has recently introduced targeted support for pupils who need to catch up and there are signs of impact in pupils' current work.
- Pupils develop a clear understanding of British values at Blackpool Aspire Academy. Pupils find out about diversity, equality, democracy and much more through assemblies and enrichment lessons, and in their tutor groups. Pupils understand what it is to be a good citizen; they treat one another with courtesy and respect.

Governance of the school

- The school benefits from strong governance. Individual governors bring a wide range of skills, expertise and extensive knowledge of the local community. Governors are aware of their core purposes. They have helped to develop the vision of the school, and this has led to the improved culture since it opened. Governors hold the principal to account and offer support.
- Governors and the trust rightly recognise that there needs to be a greater drive to compensate for the legacy of underachievement from the predecessor schools in order to improve progress and raise standards. However, the trust's assessment system, which has been recently introduced in the school, masks underachievement because progress is tracked against targets which are too broad.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are very effective. This is as a result of strong leadership and robust systems. The school adheres to all training requirements, including the 'Prevent' duty, which aims to keep pupils safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- All required checks are carried out when new staff are recruited.
- The designated lead for child protection is knowledgeable and works well with outside agencies. All incidents or disclosures are followed up thoroughly.
- Pupils feel confident about personal safety, particularly keeping themselves safe online, and have faith in the school staff to support them should problems arise.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, although improving, is not yet securing good progress consistently for pupils across year groups and across the curriculum.
- Teachers' planning does not take enough account of what pupils already know and can do. Frequently, teachers give all pupils in the class the same work, which is either too easy or too hard for some of them. As a result, some pupils make less progress than they otherwise could. While teachers' support for less-able pupils in lessons is effective, the strategies being used are not doing enough to stretch the most able. Too often, these pupils have to wait until their classmates catch up, rather than being given work that increases their mastery of subjects.
- Time is not always used productively and, as a consequence, the pace of learning slows for some pupils. For example, pupils who were factorising prime numbers made limited progress because teachers did not check what pupils could do and therefore did not provide the necessary support and challenge.
- Teachers' feedback does not support pupils' learning consistently well. Teachers do not pick up on some of the concepts that pupils find hard. Pupils say that they do not feel confident using mathematical terminology, yet not enough is being done to put this right.
- Pupils in key stage 3 make good progress in English because teachers' planning takes into account the skills required to be successful at GCSE. Consequently, Year 8 pupils were able to answer confidently complex GCSE-style questions under timed conditions on the characters in 'Of Mice and Men'. Pupils were able to speak confidently about the task and how it had stretched and challenged them. Similarly, in geography, the teacher's prior knowledge of what the pupils could do underpinned an effective challenge to the class to write a diary entry of a Nepalese Sherpa, which encouraged them to display empathy and an awareness of cultural differences.
- Some teachers have high expectations and use questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding. They check pupils' knowledge well and adapt activities accordingly. Consequently, these pupils make rapid progress over time. Teaching is particularly effective in English and geography.
- The school promotes reading well. Most-able pupils can read with fluency and expression. They show a good understanding of the books they are reading, which are appropriate to their age and ability. They look forward to reading in lessons. Less-able pupils receive additional support with their reading and are given strategies to break down words in order to develop their fluency. Pupils across the school say that they enjoy reading much more since starting at the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **Requires improvement**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders and teachers have worked hard to change the culture of the school by introducing effective systems to ensure that pupils feel safe to flourish personally,

emotionally and academically.

- Every individual is valued in this school. Everyone is recognised as different but equal. There is an inclusive environment in which pupils feel confident and comfortable to express their views while being tolerant and respectful of others. For example, pupils have welcomed a small group of Syrian refugees to the school and ensured that they feel well integrated into the life of the school. Pupils are not afraid to be open about their sexual orientation.
- Pupils who spoke to inspectors, both formally and informally, have a good understanding of various types of bullying, including homophobia, sexual and cyber bullying. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations inside and outside school. Pupils recognise the dangers associated with the internet because of the good information given to them by teachers.
- The school actively seeks ways of promoting pupils' well-being and builds their resilience.
- Leaders support pupils in the various forms of alternative provision well. They routinely check to ensure that the provision is making a positive difference to pupils' personal and academic well-being.
- Pupils are courteous, polite, well mannered and considerate. These positive attributes support their learning. Occasionally, pupils do not contribute as fully when their work is less interesting and challenging.
- All teaching and support staff that completed the online survey said that the school keeps its pupils safe. The majority of parents who responded to the survey were positive about the school and how it supports pupils, including keeping them free from harm. Inspectors' observations in school and analysis of records confirmed that it is a safe environment for young people.
- Assemblies are used well to celebrate pupils' success. Teachers routinely reward pupils for good attendance, academic excellence, resilience and positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils respond well and are rightly proud of their achievements.
- Pupils are prepared to progress to the next stage of education, training or employment. There is a comprehensive careers strategy in place that focuses on raising pupils' future aspirations when they leave school. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills, including pupil parliament representatives in each year group, and these help prepare them well for the future. Since the school opened, the number of pupils who have not moved on to education, employment and training has significantly reduced.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In some lessons, pupils do not fully engage with learning. Occasionally, pupils disrupt the learning of others. Pupils' work in lessons shows that, where teachers have high expectations and encourage academic resilience, pupils respond positively, work harder and achieve more as a result.
- Attendance is below the national average. Despite an improvement since the school opened, the proportion of pupils who are being disadvantaged by persistent absence is

above the national level. Leaders have developed a range of strategies to improve attendance, which are showing positive signs of impact. For example, leaders have strengthened their partnership-working with different agencies and, as a result, communication is stronger with school and home. Assemblies focus on attendance rates by tutor group and reward pupils who attend every day. This is encouraging pupils to see the value in coming to school. Leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils refer to lessons as 'golden hours'.

- The school's PAUSE strategy (punctuality to school and lessons; attendance to school; uniform worn in the correct manner each day; safe and sensible behaviour; expectations and examination success) is emphasised each day. Leaders, teachers and support staff routinely refer to it in lessons and around the school to ensure that standards are consistently upheld. Consequently, exclusions have reduced significantly since the school opened.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning in some subjects. This is particularly the case when teachers make sure that they stretch and challenge pupils to go the extra mile.
- Pupils behave well outside the classroom. They say that their school is one where the majority of pupils get on well with each other. They have positive relationships with adults and are very welcoming to visitors. They speak very positively about their school and the opportunities it offers them. Those parents who answered Ofsted's survey agreed with this view.
- Pupils take pride in their uniform and in their new school environment. The school is litter-free and well looked after.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision receive careful support, including from different agencies, that helps them to deal with the particular challenges they face, access learning and stay safe.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress by the end of key stage 4, particularly in English and mathematics. Despite improvements in some subjects, such as French, core science and computer science, Year 11 pupils in 2016 made significantly less progress in a range of subjects than other pupils nationally.
- The progress of all disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, is not consistently good. Leaders' actions have not yet sufficiently turned round the legacy of underachievement to enable them to catch up with other pupils nationally.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make good progress by the time they leave Year 11. An inappropriate curriculum and lack of effective support in the past have resulted in many pupils not making securely good progress. Since the appointment of a new leader in January 2016, provision has improved. The special educational needs coordinator uses performance information more sharply to address pupils' needs and evaluates the impact of support programmes to ensure that they are working.
- The recently introduced assessment system does not flag up underperformance precisely enough, particularly at key stage 3. This is because pupils' targets are too

broad and allow for slippage when tracking progress against them.

- Leaders use the catch-up funding to buy additional resources and to support individual pupils to make progress, particularly in reading. Lower-attaining pupils are able to talk about the improvements in their reading ages and how much they enjoy reading now, compared to previously. However, in mathematics, lower-attaining pupils' progress is not as good. Leaders recognise that higher expectations and tighter monitoring of this group will lead to more pupils reaching age-related expectations by the end of their first term.
- There is increased rigour around the quality of assessments and the process for moderating these within departments and across the trust. Teachers have started to assess the skills that pupils require to be successful at GCSE from Year 7 onwards, across subjects, in order to raise standards and improve progress each year.
- Leaders encourage pupils to monitor their own progress across subjects and their attendance and punctuality. Pupils say that they value the opportunity to take more ownership over their own learning.
- Current work in pupils' books shows that they make rapid progress over time in some subjects such as English and geography, but it is not as strong in mathematics and science.

School details

Unique reference number	141132
Local authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	10022805

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	631
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Wendy Middlemas
Principal	Lisa Shuttleworth-Brown
Telephone number	01253 353155
Website	www.blackpoolaspireacademy.co.uk
Email address	admin@aspire.blackpool.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Bispham High School and Collegiate High School merged to become Blackpool Aspire Academy on 1 September 2014 as part of Fylde Academy Trust.
- The school moved into a new building in November 2015.
- A small number of pupils access education off-site at Educational Diversity.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium, at around three quarters of the cohort, is well above the national average.

- The school does not meet the government's floor standards.
- The principal has been in post since September 2016. She was previously the deputy principal. She is supported by an executive principal who was the principal when the school opened as an academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out observations, many of which were joint observations with senior leaders, across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects. They also looked carefully at pupils' work and talked to pupils from different year groups to discuss their experience of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the principal, executive principal, senior and middle leaders, governors and representatives from the trust.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and assessments to check pupils' progress over time.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and members of the local governing body.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including the records for safeguarding pupils, case studies, attendance records, self-evaluation summaries, the school improvement plan and current assessment information.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 18 parents and 58 members of staff from the online questionnaires. There were no responses from pupils.

Inspection team

Lisa Crausby, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Debra Wood	Ofsted Inspector
David Selby	Her Majesty's Inspector
Linda Griffiths	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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