

Alder Grange School

Calder Road, Rawtenstall, Rossendale, Lancashire BB4 8HW

Inspection dates

14–15 March 2017

| Overall effectiveness | Good |
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| 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

- Senior leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas that require further development. The school's plans for improvement tackle the right issues.
- Teaching is good in most areas of the school. Teachers appreciate and benefit from a wide range of professional development opportunities to improve their practice. Experienced staff support and challenge trainee teachers well to develop their skills.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and many provide useful feedback to pupils about how to improve their work. Effective explanations and skilful questioning promote good learning.
- The school is particularly effective in supporting pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. All adults in the school work as a team to ensure the well-being of pupils at risk from harm.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and during the less structured times of the school day. They are polite, courteous and respectful. Pupils are very friendly and welcoming to visitors.
- Pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are catching up with others.
- Pupils are very proud of their school and are provided with many opportunities to develop leadership and team skills.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good and standards are improving. Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good. Leaders have worked hard to ensure that all sixth-form students receive the highest quality guidance and support.
- There are inconsistencies within and across subjects because routines for checking by middle leaders are not sufficiently rigorous. In English and history, progress is less consistent than in other subjects.
- Very occasionally, work set is too easy or too hard. When this happens, pupils do not make as much progress as they could.
- Governors engage in regular training to update their skills. The governing body is beginning to challenge senior leaders more effectively. Governors have not yet fully evaluated the impact of the pupil premium funding with sufficient rigour.
- Pupils' attendance rates are close to the national average and improving overall. However, the attendance disadvantaged pupils is not improving as rapidly as the attendance of others.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that outcomes for all pupils at least match those of other pupils nationally by:
 - securing improvements in English and history
 - accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - ensuring that work set for all pupils offers exactly the right amount of challenge so that they can make good progress
 - improving the attendance rates of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium and of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Increase the impact of leadership and management further by:
 - strengthening the ability of governors to support and challenge school leaders
 - rigorously evaluating the impact of the pupil premium spending on pupils eligible for support
 - providing support and training for middle leaders to improve the quality of provision and raise pupils' outcomes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors are supported by an extremely committed staff. Together they have developed a forward-looking school to which parents want to send their children. As a result, the numbers on roll at the school continue to rise.
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement of the school and their plans are appropriately directed.
- Governors are kept well informed. They provide effective support and increasingly effective challenge to school leaders. Governors are acting on the recommendations of recently commissioned reviews of English and of pupil premium spending.
- Actions taken by senior leaders since the time of the last inspection have led to improvements in mathematics and to the sixth form, which is now good.
- The school provides a culture of ambition for pupils, some of whom arrive at the school with low self-esteem and lack the confidence that they need to do well. The school supports pupils' emotional needs well, and the vast majority believe that they can succeed.
- Recent changes to the school's curriculum have created improved opportunities for pupils. The curriculum gives pupils of all abilities and aptitudes the opportunity to do well and to progress to appropriate placements when they leave. It is broad and balanced and is supported by a range of extra-curricular activities. Parents value teachers' commitment to extra-curricular activities. The curriculum makes strong provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The amended curriculum and improvements in teaching and learning are leading to better progress for some groups of pupils, including those who made less progress than they should have done in 2016. There is a good mix of academic and work-related learning options for pupils to choose from. The school's records show that the numbers of pupils who do not go on to education, employment or training are below the national average.
- Pupils are well prepared to take their place in modern Britain because the curriculum offers pupils opportunities to learn about democracy and tolerance. The school does not shy away from teaching about potentially contentious issues to help pupils to understand the dangers of extremism.
- Shared values are communicated effectively through form groups, assemblies and most activities. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong. They willingly take part in charitable endeavours. Pupils value the opportunities that they have to develop leadership skills and they take their responsibilities seriously.
- The quality of subject leadership is variable. Some leaders are less skilled than others at identifying and sharing good practice and, as a result, improving teaching.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and those who join the school with attainment below national expectations is being used to remove the barriers that can stop these pupils from doing well. For example, there has been a drive to improve pupils' reading, writing and speaking skills. This is ensuring that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make the most of their time at school and are well prepared for the next stage in their education, work or training.
- Leaders make appropriate use of additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The achievement of this group of pupils is improving. Leaders have ensured that teaching assistants who support pupils who require additional help have appropriate expertise.
- Leaders are focused on further improving the quality of teaching. This commitment was clear during meetings with staff, during lesson observations and in feedback discussions

with teachers. The school's partnership work through the Pennine Lancashire SCITT has been important in improving teaching. Strong teaching is evident in a number of subjects, including in mathematics, science and languages.

- Leaders manage teachers' performance rigorously. The school's leaders work hard in their endeavour to secure consistency in the quality of teaching. When leaders have concerns about standards being achieved in subjects or by teachers, they provide high-quality support and challenge.
- School leaders have made sure that parents are kept well informed about their children's education. Parents are able to access helpful information about their children's experience at school through the school's website.

Governance of the school

- Several new governors have been appointed since the last inspection, including a new chair and vice-chair. Governors are keen to ensure that their skills are regularly updated and with that in mind, have carried out a skills audit. They have responded to this audit by engaging in ongoing training and development and, when vacancies do arise, by recruiting suitably experienced and skilled governors.
- Governors know the school's context well. They are determined to ensure that all pupils who are educated at Alder Grange are supported in becoming confident, self-assured young people who have a clear sense of their rights and responsibilities towards others as well as achieving well academically.
- Governors have worked hard to secure effective sixth-form provision for pupils of all levels of ability and from a wide range of social backgrounds. They have ensured that all sixth-form students leave Alder Grange with the skills they need to enable them to be successful in their chosen routes beyond school. All students progress to employment, training or higher education when they leave.
- Governors receive accurate information about the performance of the school. They ensure that the performance management process for staff is rigorous and fair. Governors have not, until recently, challenged senior leaders strongly enough about the attainment and progress of groups of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's record of recruitment checks on the suitability of adults to work with children meets requirements. Staff are trained appropriately and are knowledgeable about the latest guidance about keeping children safe in education. Training has included how to protect pupils from the dangers of extremism. E-safety is taken seriously. All staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil.
- Leaders have developed their own systems for monitoring the welfare of all pupils about whom they have concerns. This is very effective in ensuring that those involved in keeping pupils safe can keep a watchful eye on issues, both within and outside school, that are relevant to the safety of individual pupils.
- The school works closely with parents to ensure the safety of pupils who may be particularly vulnerable.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and support good learning. During the inspection, many pupils told inspectors how much they appreciate the support they receive from their teachers.
- Teachers often use questioning to encourage deeper thinking and enable pupils to get stuck in to discussion and debate. For example, in a Year 7 drama lesson the teacher was challenging pupils to think about how they could improve their performance in a short play based upon a Greek tragedy. The teacher's precise and relentless questioning encouraged pupils to reflect on their individual responses, deepen their understanding and maintain high levels of engagement and enjoyment in their learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use to inspire and enthuse pupils and to put pupils' learning into context. In mathematics lessons, pupils quickly move on to applying their knowledge and understanding to solving problems. Several pupils told inspectors that they enjoy their learning in mathematics: this enthusiasm is reflected in pupils' positive outcomes.
- The vast majority of parents are extremely satisfied with the quality of teaching their children receive. Many parents who responded to the online questionnaire commented positively about the amount of support that children receive from their teachers.
- Teachers promote reading for pupils of all abilities. Pupils are encouraged to read during registration and Year 8 pupils visit the library regularly during English lessons. Readers are encouraged to attempt increasingly challenging books. Pupils whose reading skills are weak on entry to Year 7 receive effective support to help them improve.
- Many teachers use the information that they have about individuals to plan suitably challenging work. This is not always the case and where the level of challenge is too low, for example in some English classes, pupils find the work too easy and do not make as much progress as they could.
- Teachers are increasingly using information about disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to plan activities that both challenge and support them to learn well. However, their progress is still not in line with the progress of other pupils nationally.
- The school's marking and feedback policy supports the development of pupils' vocabulary and other literacy skills. Key technical vocabulary is well promoted, but not all teachers apply the policy consistently and even when pupils make corrections, not all teachers check them for accuracy.
- Teachers set homework regularly in accordance with the school's policy. Parents are generally positive about the amount of homework provided. Pupils say that it generally reinforces learning.
- Although teaching continues to improve and is mainly good across the school, notably in mathematics, science and languages, there are still some inconsistencies left in English and in history.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff cater well for pupils' physical and emotional well-being. The majority of parents are extremely positive and appreciative about the care that their children receive while at school.
- Communications with the parents of pupils judged to be at risk are very effective and help to secure the welfare of these pupils.
- Staff are well trained and vigilant in identifying pupils experiencing difficulties. School staff always act swiftly to ensure that pupils receive the help that they need. Partnership work between the school and external agencies, to support pupils having difficulties, is strong and effective.
- The safety of pupils who are educated in alternative provision is regularly and frequently monitored by senior leaders.
- The school has been named as a 'Rights Respecting School' by UNICEF. Inspectors heard teachers and pupils discussing rights and responsibilities in a range of contexts during the inspection, including in lessons and tutor time as well as during general conversations. Pupils of all ages are very clear about the relationship between rights and responsibilities and this is exemplified in the respectful way they treat one another.
- Most pupils are self-confident. They are taught explicitly by the school how to be successful learners. Pupils were seen working well together in small groups and in pairs. This helps them to learn from one another and to share their ideas and opinions.
- Independent careers advice and guidance is a strength of the school. The high quality of the careers advice that the school provides helps pupils to understand why they need to work hard in school and do well.
- The school's anti-bullying records demonstrate staff have taken robust actions when there have been instances of bullying. Pupils told inspectors that incidences of bullying are rare. The harmful effects of bullying are covered in detail by the school's curriculum.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school has a clear behaviour policy, which sets high standards for pupils' conduct. The majority of pupils behave well. The negative behaviour of a small minority of pupils is very well managed and does not impact adversely on others.
- There is a high staff presence around the school which helps pupils to make good behaviour choices and ensures that pupils' movements around the school are orderly. Behaviour during the inspection was exemplary.
- Pupils are very sociable; they are courteous and friendly to visitors, holding doors open and offering to show guests where to go. Pupils care about each other and respect the different communities that are represented in the school.
- Pupils are given many opportunities to take on responsibilities and to develop leadership skills. They also contribute to managing behaviour. The head boy and head girl can recommend appropriate sanctions for pupils who commit minor offences. This process is overseen by school leaders.
- The proportion of pupils who are permanently excluded from school because of poor behavior is below the national average. The school manages pupils who demonstrate challenging behaviour very well and leaders work hard to ensure that they are supported in school in their specialist 'AG+' inclusion area.
- Pupils' attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection and continues to do so, with current attendance close to the national average. Leaders have put effective procedures in place to support good attendance. The number of pupils who are regularly absent has reduced this school year, for all groups of pupils. However, the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities needs to be reduced further.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2016, the progress made by pupils from the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 11 was good in a wide range of subjects, including mathematics, science and languages.
- Actions taken to improve teaching have led to improvements in mathematics since the time of the last inspection and outcomes in mathematics are good in all year groups.
- The rapid improvements made in mathematics are not yet fully evident in English. Although improving, pupils' attainment and progress is not as pronounced in English, mainly because not all teaching is consistently good. Senior leaders are fully aware of this and have prioritised English in their plans for further improvement.
- The school's records show that since September 2016, disadvantaged pupils in all year groups are making better progress in a wide range of subjects. However, they do not attain as well as other pupils nationally. Senior leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to accelerate the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders and teachers are able to accurately predict how well pupils will perform in examinations because assessment procedures are systematic and rigorous. Assessment information is checked within school and also with teachers from partner schools.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate, a government performance measure covering five academic GCSE subjects, in the last two years has remained low. Action is being taken to improve this. Senior leaders have altered the curriculum in key stage 4 so that more pupils study five core GCSE subjects.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of the sixth form is strong.
- Relationships between teachers and students are positive and purposeful.
- Teachers' expectations of their students are high and teaching in the sixth form is consistently strong.
- Teachers ask searching questions and set challenging work.
- The small number of students who enter the sixth form without good GCSE passes in English and mathematics are well supported to achieve better results in resit examinations.
- Over time, students have made progress in line with the national average in academic subjects and slightly less progress in applied and vocational subjects. Currently, assessment information and work in books indicate that students are making strong progress overall. There are no marked differences between the achievements of different groups.
- Sixth-form leaders check the assessment information submitted by each department carefully. They challenge any underperformance by departments and individual students robustly.
- The school meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes. Students are well informed about the world of work. All participate in work experience, which they find and apply for themselves. Teachers guide students through the process of choosing and applying for a university place effectively.
- Leaders check the careers information, advice and guidance, which are provided for students by an external body carefully. Students are positive about this guidance and know where to go to gather more information.
- Leaders have high expectations of students' attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Students conform to school rules because they are also given greater flexibility to manage their time efficiently. Students appreciate that the school rules are preparing them well for the more independent life at university, college or work.
- Safeguarding is effective in the sixth form because teachers are vigilant and the school's systems and procedures are followed consistently.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 119722 |
| Local authority | Lancashire |
| Inspection number | 10024339 |

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.

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| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Maintained |
| 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 | 900 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 171 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Ronnie Barker |
| Headteacher | Mr David Hampson |
| Telephone number | 01706 223171 |
| Website | www.aldergrange.com |
| Email address | reception@aldergrange.lancs.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 1–2 May 2013 |

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school. It is non-selective within a locality that operates a selective system.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported through pupil premium funding is average.
- The majority of pupils are of White British origin. Approximately 15% are of Bangladeshi heritage and about 10% speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- Alder Grange has a strong commitment to Initial Teacher Training, being the lead school in the Pennine Lancashire SCITT, and has a high level of participation in school-to-school support as a National Support School.
- The school's headteacher is supported by a head of school who has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- A small number of pupils are educated in alternative provision including at Coal Clough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classrooms across a wide range of subjects in all key stages. Two learning walks, on the first day of the inspection, were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at their work to find out more about how well they were learning. Inspectors listened to four Year 7 pupils and four Year 8 pupils read.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Discussions were held with pupils in all key stages.
- Additional meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders and members of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school more broadly and looked at a range of documentation, including policies, minutes of governing body meetings, the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation document.
- Inspectors considered 77 responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire and 56 responses to the questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|
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| Rochelle Conefrey | Ofsted Inspector |
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| Dympna Woods | Ofsted Inspector |
| Annette Patterson | Ofsted Inspector |

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