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Atherton Community School

Hamilton Street, Atherton, Greater Manchester M46 0AY

Inspection dates	7–8 February 2018

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not learn consistently well because the quality of teaching is too variable.

- Outcomes for the school's first Year 11 cohort were inadequate in 2017.

- Teachers do not routinely provide pupils of different abilities with work that challenges them to make fast progress.

- Pupils are not supported effectively to develop the quality of their extended writing across the curriculum.

- Leaders' plans to improve the school lack precision.

- Leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is underdeveloped, particularly in relation to sharing good practice and working with other schools.

- Leaders' monitoring does not consistently evaluate the impact of teaching on learning.

- Leaders' use of the pupil premium has not been effective enough.

- The new two-year key stage 3 curriculum is not well planned in all subjects.

- Members of the local academy board have not been well trained. Consequently, they have not held leaders to account for the school's declining performance. They are unsure of their responsibilities in relation to trustees.

- Rates of absence remain high, despite leaders' improved system for raising attendance.

- Pupils do not consistently take pride in their work.

- The school is over-reliant on using fixed-term exclusion as a sanction. As a result, rates of exclusion are high, particularly for pupils who join the school midway through the academic year.

The school has the following strengths

- Due to improved teaching, current pupils are making faster progress in nearly all subjects.

- Pupils behave well around the site and in most lessons. Pupils feel safe and say that bullying is rare.

- Leaders have greatly improved the accuracy and usefulness of assessment.

- Leaders have employed creative solutions to engage with parents and the local community. As a result, the large majority of parents are pleased with the school's work and the school is oversubscribed in Years 7 and 8.

- Safeguarding is effective and pupils are well cared for.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the impact of leadership and management at all levels, by:
  - using self-assessment and improvement planning more effectively to address areas of weakness across the school
  - further developing the range and scope of leaders' work with other schools to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
  - improving the way that the pupil premium is evaluated and deployed, to help disadvantaged pupils to make faster progress
  - developing training for teachers so there are more effective opportunities to share the strong practice that exists
  - evaluating and refining the curriculum in subjects beyond English, mathematics and science to ensure that pupils develop a broad knowledge and understanding in subjects that are optional at GCSE
  - ensuring that leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning carefully evaluates the impact that teaching is having on learning
  - improving training for members of the local academy board so they have the skills and knowledge to be able to hold leaders to account for the performance of the school
  - ensuring that members of the local trust board understand their responsibilities in relation to those of trustees.
- Continue to improve teaching, learning and assessment, so that pupils, particularly the disadvantaged and less able, make faster progress, by:
  - reducing the variabilities that exist in the quality of teaching across the curriculum
  - consistently providing pupils of all abilities with work that challenges them to make fast progress, particularly in classes where there is a broad range of abilities
  - developing the teaching of literacy across the curriculum, particularly in relation to pupils' extended writing.
- Improve pupils' behaviour, by:
  - embedding and strengthening systems for increasing pupils' attendance
  - ensuring that pupils consistently take pride in their work across all subjects
  - reviewing the school's systems and procedures for sanctioning pupils, to reduce the school's over-reliance on fixed-term exclusion
  - further developing strategies to support pupils who have previously exhibited challenging behaviour, particularly those who join the school midway through the academic year.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should 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

- Leaders were unaware that pupils were underachieving until the inadequate GCSE results of 2017. This was because they had not ensured that teachers were assessing learning accurately, and because their checks on the quality of teaching and assessment had not been effective. Both the local academy board and trustees had been too accepting of leaders' overgenerous assessment of how they, and pupils, were performing during this period. Since the inadequate key stage 4 outcomes of 2017, however, leaders and trustees have instigated an ambitious programme of reform to improve teaching, leadership and pupils' outcomes.

- Leaders have engineered significant improvements to teaching, learning and assessment over the last six months. As a result, pupils are now making significantly quicker progress. However, leadership requires improvement because many of the developments that have been orchestrated are not embedded and require further development. For example, strategies for improving the quality of teaching have lifted the overall effectiveness of teaching, but significant variabilities remain. Similarly, leaders have improved the quality of pupil behaviour, but this has not prevented a further rise in the rate of exclusion. Leaders can therefore clearly demonstrate the impact of their work in improving the school. However, they have not demonstrated that the overall impact of their work is good.

- Leaders have a better understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Despite this, their evaluation of the school's overall effectiveness remains overgenerous. Their plans to improve the school aim to address those areas most needing attention. However, they do not include the level of detail that is needed for leaders, governors and trustees to be able to measure progress in different areas. As a result, leaders' approach to improving the school is not fully systematic.

- Leaders have not been discerning in their use of the pupil premium. Their evaluation of previous spending has been vague and imprecise. Furthermore, it has been undermined by overgenerous assessment that has indicated that disadvantaged pupils have been making rapid progress. Consequently, leaders' spending of the pupil premium has not been based upon a sound understanding of what has worked well in the past. Leaders' rationale for the use of the pupil premium is stronger this year. However, this has not ensured that progress has accelerated as much for disadvantaged pupils as it has for other groups.

- Leaders have not ensured that the new two-year key stage 3 curriculum is well planned in all subjects, particularly those that are optional at GCSE. For example, the history curriculum lacks balance and certain crucial periods of history are not studied. As a result, it is difficult for pupils to develop a secure chronological understanding of the past.

- Leaders have strengthened their checks on the quality of teaching and learning. However, they have not consistently evaluated the impact of teaching on learning. As a result, much of leaders' monitoring focuses on whether teachers are complying with school initiatives rather than evaluating the effectiveness of teaching.

- Leaders have only recently started to collaborate meaningfully with other schools to

improve teaching and raise standards. Subject leaders, in particular, feel revitalised by the opportunity to work closely with colleagues from other schools. Furthermore, there is clear evidence to indicate that the quality and accuracy of assessment has improved dramatically as a result of this work. Despite this, leaders' efforts to collaborate are in their early stages and the focus of this work has been relatively narrow in scope.

■ Leaders can demonstrate how training for teachers has impacted positively upon their practice. However, leaders have not been methodical in providing routine opportunities for sharing the increasingly strong practice that exists throughout the school.

■ Subject leadership has been strengthened significantly during the current academic year. Subject leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of performance in their areas. They are having a demonstrable impact on improving teaching and outcomes. Despite this, there are still some subjects where a lack of subject leadership is impeding progress, particularly in modern foreign languages.

■ Leaders have a sound rationale for the introduction of a three-year key stage 4 curriculum. They have increased the number of subjects that pupils study at GCSE to increase the breadth and balance of the curriculum. Approximately three quarters of pupils in Years 9 and 10 are studying the English Baccalaureate. This reflects leaders' high academic expectations.

■ Leaders attach great significance to the importance of enrichment. All pupils are required to attend 'lesson six', which runs until 4.00pm. The curriculum therefore ensures that all pupils in Years 7 to 9 are involved in daily extra-curricular activities. For example, pupils participate in a number of compulsory clubs such as origami and 'skills for life'.

■ Fundamental British values are promoted well across the school. Leaders recognise the importance of involving pupils in regular democratic processes. They have carefully mapped the curriculum to ensure that pupils learn about different values in various subjects. As a result, pupils have strong morals; they are considerate and accepting of others.

■ Leaders have employed a number of creative strategies to engage with parents and the wider community. For example, they have offered night classes and run quiz nights to promote a sense of fun and community. This work has contributed to the increasing faith that parents have in the school. The large majority of parents value the work of the school and the school's reputation is growing in the local area. This is reflected in the rapid increase in pupil numbers, with Years 7 and 8 being oversubscribed.

Governance of the school

■ Members of the local academy board have not done enough to arrest the school's decline since the previous inspection. Although passionate and committed, they are small in number and have not effectively held leaders to account during a period of decline.

■ Members of the local academy board have been too accepting of information leaders have provided. They attach too much significance to anecdotal evidence when evaluating leaders' work. As a result, they were oblivious to declining standards until the first set of Year 11 examination results in 2017.

- Governors have not received appropriate training that would enable them to oversee the school's work more effectively. They are unclear on their responsibilities in relation to those of trustees.

- Governance has strengthened during the current academic year, as a result of two new members with considerable educational experience joining the local academy board. As a result, leaders are beginning to hold leaders to account more effectively.

- Established members of the local academy board understand the dynamics of the local community. They have played an important role in building positive relationships with parents and members of the local community.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- The single central record meets requirements. Pupils are well cared for and there is an established culture of safeguarding. Leaders have improved the systems for staff to report concerns about a pupil. As a result, safeguarding records contain an appropriate level of detail.

- Leaders enlist the support of external agencies to help support pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

- Pupils benefit from a structured programme that helps them to develop a strong awareness of different risks. For example, they have a good understanding of the dangers of drugs and alcohol. They are also supported to develop an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships.

- Pupils say that they feel safe at the school. They say that bullying is rare and, on the rare occasions it does occur, teachers are adept at resolving issues. The vast majority of parents feel their child is safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement because it is not consistently good across the school. The quality of teaching varies too much across, and within, different subject areas.

- The most effective teaching inspires pupils' interest and is characterised by teachers' high expectations and careful planning for pupils' different starting points. Where teaching is less effective, it does not offer sufficient challenge to pupils, particularly for those with low prior attainment. Where lessons are delivered by non-specialists, teachers sometimes lack subject knowledge and a clear understanding of how to teach subject-specific skills effectively.

- There are weaknesses in the development of pupils' reading, writing and communication skills across the curriculum. In particular, teachers' expectations of pupils' extended writing are too low. Furthermore, not enough attention is paid to developing the depth, fluency and sophistication of pupils' written work.

- Teachers' expectations of how neatly pupils should present their work varies significantly. As a result, pupils take great pride in their work in some subjects, but

show considerably less care in others.

■ Pupils enjoy practical subjects such as physical education (PE) and art because they are taught very well. Teachers in these subjects have high expectations. They question pupils effectively and model different skills clearly.

■ Teaching is also strong in mathematics and religious education. Teachers of these subjects know pupils exceptionally well as a result of regular and high-quality assessment. Consequently, they provide different pupils with work that is carefully matched to their needs and abilities.

■ Teachers' use of assessment has improved markedly this year. Teachers in all departments have started to moderate assessments regularly among themselves and with colleagues from other schools. As a result, teachers now have a far clearer and more accurate understanding of how well pupils are achieving. Some teachers are using assessment information to help them plan learning that aims to address gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. However, this is not a consistent feature of teaching.

■ Despite improvements to assessment systems, teachers' use of assessment in subjects beyond English, mathematics and science in key stage 3 is not as effective as it is in Years 9 to 11. As a result, the accuracy of teachers' assessment is not as reliable as it in key stage 4.

■ Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are taught well. Teachers make good use of 'pen portraits' to tailor learning to pupils' needs. In addition, teaching assistants support these pupils effectively. They question pupils skilfully to develop their understanding. They are particularly adept at supporting pupils to develop their numeracy skills.

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 make sure that pupils are well cared for. The majority of parents greatly appreciate the care that their children receive while at the school.

■ Pupils are supported to become thoughtful and considerate citizens. For example, all pupils pledge to raise a minimum of £15 for their chosen charity each year.

■ Pupils say that the use of prejudicial language is very rare because of the work done by the school to promote respect and understanding.

■ Pupils respond positively to the school's work to keep them safe. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and are aware of how to manage risk outside school.

■ The school's work to promote pupils' emotional and physical health is strong. For example, all pupils in Years 7 to 9 participate in compulsory extra-curricular sport.

■ Pupils benefit from very strong careers information and guidance from Year 7 onwards. The school attaches great significance to the importance of building aspiration among pupils. For example, the corridors are adorned with positive messages that encourage pupils to consider following a diverse range of occupations. Pupils are supported to

develop employability skills, and the school enjoys strong links with local businesses and colleges. As a result, pupils develop a very clear and realistic understanding of the options that are available to them when they leave the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.

- Rates of absence have increased markedly since 2015 and are above national averages. Leaders have strengthened the school's systems for supporting and challenging the families of pupils who are regularly absent from school. As a result, there are clear signs that rates of persistent absenteeism are beginning to decrease.

- On the other hand, overall rates of absence have remained stubbornly high. Leaders have therefore introduced clear systems to ensure that pupils who have time off school are not disadvantaged in their education. For example, these pupils are directed to 'Saturday school' or 'catch-up sessions' that take place during school holidays.

- There has also been a pronounced increase in the school's use of exclusion as a sanction. Leaders' records indicate that pupils who join the school midway through an academic year are disproportionately the recipients of these exclusions. As a result, leaders are in the process of strengthening mid-year transition arrangements.

- Leaders have indicated that they would like to utilise a greater range of alternative sanctions for serious misbehaviour, but do not have the resources to facilitate this. As a result, leaders are over-reliant on fixed-term exclusion as a sanction.

- Pupils' behaviour is typically good in lessons. They are keen to do well and generally work hard. Where teaching is weaker, pupils do not behave as well and low-level misbehaviour can inhibit learning. Furthermore, pupils do not take pride in their work when teachers' expectations are not high.

- Pupils are considerate and polite towards each other at break and lunchtime, and when moving around the site. As a result, the school is calm and orderly.

Outcomes for pupils	**Requires improvement**

- The school's first ever set of GCSE results were clearly inadequate. All groups of pupils had made poor progress from their starting points in most subjects, including English, science, history and geography. Teachers' assessments of how well pupils were performing were wildly overgenerous. As a result, leaders were unaware of the extent to which teaching was failing to facilitate solid progress.

- Leaders have demonstrated that the composition of the school's first Year 11 cohort was unusual. Most notably, 50% of the small cohort had joined the school at times other than at the start of Year 7. Furthermore, a relatively large proportion joined during key stage 4.

- Leaders have used the disappointment of the 2017 examination results as a springboard for implementing a range of strategies to accelerate pupils' progress. Leaders' tracking data indicates that pupils currently in Year 11 are making better progress than their counterparts last year. However, leaders' information is still

indicating that overall progress from starting points remains significantly below where it should be.

■ Leaders' information on pupils' current progress indicates that pupils in Years 7 to 10 are making faster progress that is broadly in line with national figures. This is due to a combination of factors, including improved teaching, more accurate and robust assessment, and a more stable pupil population.

■ All groups of pupils are now making faster progress throughout the school, including: boys, girls, disadvantaged pupils, those who have SEN and/or disabilities, and all prior-attainment groups.

■ The 2017 GCSE results indicated that pupils made good progress in mathematics, PE, art, catering and biology. Current pupils are now making faster progress in most subjects, including English, science and humanities.

■ Inspection evidence confirmed that teachers are now assessing pupils more accurately, especially in key stage 4. As a result, leaders' tracking information is far more reliable than it has been in the past.

■ As pupils make faster progress throughout the school, it is apparent that the rate of improvement for disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment is less impressive. This is because teaching is weaker for low-ability pupils. It is also because leaders' use of the pupil premium is not shrewd and not effective enough.

■ Almost all pupils progressed to suitable destinations at the end of the previous academic year. Pupils advanced to a broad range of destinations that were well suited to their aptitudes, interests and prior attainment. This, in part, is due to the strong programme of careers education provided by the school. Leaders acknowledge that some pupils' weak examination results prevented them from accessing higher-level courses.

School details

Unique reference number	138233
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10044952

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	396
Appropriate authority	Local academy board
Chair	Trevor Barton
Principal	Lynn Burton
Telephone number	01942 885500
Website	www.athertoncommunityschool.com
Email address	enquiries@atherton-cs.org
Date of previous inspection	4–5 June 2014

Information about this school

- This free school opened in September 2012.
- The school is part of the Chapel Street Community Schools Trust. Chapel Street is a Christian charity.
- The school is governed by the local academy board. The work of the school is also overseen by the board of trustees.
- The school's sixth form closed in July 2017.
- The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- More pupils enter the school at different times of the year than is seen nationally, particularly in key stage 4.
- The school is full in Years 7 and 8. New pupils rarely join these year groups.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is higher than average.

- The percentage of pupils who are from an ethnic minority group or who speak English as an additional language is much lower than is seen nationally.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is higher than the national average.

- No pupil is educated off-site or in alternative provision.

- The school does not meet the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations of pupils' performance at the end of key stage 4.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching across the school and carried out an extensive scrutiny of pupils' work alongside their tracking information.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils formally and at social times.
- Inspectors scrutinised school policies and records relating to safeguarding, self-evaluation information and a range of other documentation.
- There were 33 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered 92 responses to Parent View and 31 free-text responses. Inspectors also read emails from parents, and spoke with other parents on the telephone.
- Meetings were held with groups of staff, middle leaders and senior leaders. Inspectors also spoke with members of the local academy board, the school's improvement partner and the chief executive officer of the Chapel Street Community Schools Trust.

Inspection team

Will Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Vicky Atherton	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Edmondson	Ofsted Inspector

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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