

Three Towers Alternative Provision Academy

Leyland Park House, Park Road, Hindley, Wigan, Greater Manchester WN2 3RX

Inspection dates

13–14 February 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and staff ensure that pupils are at the heart of all that the school does.
- Believing in pupils is the watchword of leaders and staff. As a result, pupils who have behavioural, social, emotional, mental health and medical needs thrive.
- Governors effectively champion the school locally. They make a valuable contribution to school improvement and they ensure the best for pupils.
- Pupils who attend Three Towers have often struggled in their previous schools. Now, the vast majority of pupils are successful learners and make outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Leaders and teachers know pupils extremely well. An innovative assessment system is used to match precisely activities to pupils' learning needs. However, leaders are aware that the system still needs to be refined further.
- Teachers' flexible approach to teaching and learning, their strong subject knowledge and extremely positive relationships ensure that pupils enjoy school and have very positive attitudes to learning.
- Teachers are skilled in identifying exactly what will attract each pupil to engage in learning. Each pupil is offered a personalised curriculum to maximise their chances of success.
- The school provides an engaging and enjoyable curriculum. The excellent enrichment curriculum provides pupils with opportunities to participate in activities that they would otherwise not experience. It is instrumental in building pupils' confidence, self-belief and resilience.
- Pupils' outstanding personal development and welfare are central to the work of the school. The highly effective emotional literacy sessions support pupils to develop their social and emotional skills.
- Pupils feel very safe and extremely well looked after in school. They said that adults are 'supportive and understanding'. Parents and carers agreed.
- Behaviour is good. The vast majority of pupils conduct themselves extremely well around school.
- A very small number of pupils have found it difficult to settle or to manage their behaviour. Despite leaders working diligently and successfully to reduce exclusions, the level of exclusion remains too high.
- Leaders have worked hard to improve the attendance of pupils. They have had some notable successes with pupils who were regularly absent from school. However, a small proportion of pupils still do not attend regularly enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refine the systems for the assessment of pupils' achievements and explore opportunities to compare assessments and standards with a wider group of schools.
- Continue to reduce the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school.
- Further reduce the number of pupils who are excluded from school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders, governors and the multi-academy trust (MAT) have worked with determination to provide the very best for all pupils. As a result, Three Towers is an outstanding place to learn. Leaders are passionate about making a positive difference to pupils' lives. Together with the whole-staff team, they remove barriers to learning and create a nurturing environment where pupils feel secure.
- The visionary leadership of the headteacher and her resolve to bring together a disparate range of alternative educational provision under one roof have been a resounding success. The school motto, 'Expanding horizons', captures the leaders' uncompromising belief in each individual pupil and the potential that can be unlocked. The school is exemplary in the way it promotes equality and diversity, which in turn ensures that pupils develop the capacity to be caring, considerate, respectful and tolerant of each other and of others in the wider community.
- Leaders have worked successfully to develop a consistent approach and high expectations across the school. They have secured the commitment of the vast majority of staff, parents and pupils. This contributes to staff's positive motivation and the drive for continual improvement. The school benefits from a dedicated team whose members are proud to work at Three Towers. A very large majority of staff feel very well supported and consider the school to be well led and managed.
- The senior leadership team is shared across the different areas of provision and specialisms. All members are strong, committed leaders and their knowledge of the school and of their areas of responsibility is thorough. They accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement and reflect these in a detailed school development plan. There is a schedule of regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning, and for looking at progress in pupils' books.
- Heads of departments are enthusiastic and hard working. They monitor pupils' progress across the school and are good contributors to ongoing school improvement. They are given regular opportunities to develop their areas of responsibility by going into classrooms, working in pairs to observe lessons and talking to staff. They work closely with colleagues from the MAT, sharing good practice and opportunities for further development.
- The school, along with the other schools in the MAT, has developed a very robust system to identify where a pupil is in their learning, and to collect assessment information. It is used highly effectively to assess each individual learner's needs, including their emotional development needs. The information gathered allows leaders to analyse pupils' learning very precisely. Leaders and staff use the assessment information that they collect methodically to update their knowledge of pupils' progress and to plan their next steps in learning. As a result, staff know pupils extremely well and use this information to deliver pertinent learning for each individual pupil. Leaders are very aware that there is still more to be done to refine this system further, for example by ensuring that the leaders and staff in the primary phase are using the same system as the rest of the school, and establishing an approach to regularly checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils against other schools

nationally.

- The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum that is enjoyable and engaging for pupils. English is a particular strength in the secondary phase, as is emotional literacy across the whole school. Pupils visibly enjoy their food technology and drama lessons. One pupil said, 'Cookery is the best thing ever', and this is a typical sentiment. Physical education (PE), science, and information and communication technology (ICT) are also popular. The art department enables pupils to reach the highest of standards. This is abundantly evident in the excellent and varied art work around the school. In the primary phase, pupils are offered a vibrant and engaging curriculum to ensure that learning is fun. As pupils reach key stage 4, leaders ensure that if a pupil has a talent or interest in a particular subject, they will, as one parent explained, 'Go above and beyond' to accommodate them, for example by offering GCSE Japanese.
- The school's enrichment curriculum is exceptional. It is rightly seen as making a significant contribution to developing pupils' self-belief, their self-confidence and their personal development. Pupils have the opportunity to experience outdoor residential and non-residential activities, such as walking, rock climbing, abseiling, archery, building campfires and team activities. Pupils benefit from the school's 'eco' sessions, through topics such as waste and recycling. They enjoy trips to places such as Blackpool, ten-pin bowling and the cinema. Key stage 4 pupils have the opportunity to attend vocational and work experience placements, for example working in fishery management, floristry, with horses or with dogs. For the more academic, and depending on individual aspirations, pupils are offered placements as diverse as working in an ICT environment or in a law firm.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is threaded through all of the school's activities. Consequently, the school provides a calm, considerate and thoughtful environment where pupils mix well together. Pupils in all key stages are actively involved in the school community, which contributes to developing and promoting the school's values and fundamental British values. Pupils effectively learn about the wider community, tolerance, respect and the rule of law.
- The pupil premium funding is used very effectively to reduce any barriers to learning that may be experienced by disadvantaged pupils. It is particularly well used to ensure that pupils benefit from activities and areas of the curriculum to which they might not otherwise have access. The progress of pupils supported by this funding is monitored rigorously. The impact of the use of the pupil premium funding is evaluated carefully by the headteacher and governors. This enables disadvantaged pupils to be successful and be part of everything the school has to offer.
- The primary school PE and sport premium funding is used creatively to provide key stage 2 pupils with a range of sporting and physical activities.
- Leaders use additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities extremely effectively to provide additional staffing and resources to successfully support pupils' individual needs.
- The school benefits from positive and mutually supportive relationships with other schools in the MAT – presently two secondary schools and a primary school. The school's excellent practice in working with pupils who have social, emotional and mental health issues is highly valued and drawn upon in other local authority schools, particularly at the primary stage. The headteacher plays a full part within a network of

local mainstream secondary schools and staff attend local authority training and curriculum meetings.

Governance of the school

- Governors make an important contribution to raising standards in the school. They have been an excellent support to the headteacher.
- Governors know the school extremely well and are confident and skilled to ask challenging questions. They are equipped to be involved in all aspects of the school's development and in the monitoring of improvement.
- Governors have a good understanding of performance management procedures and, as well as holding teachers and leaders to account, they ensure that the management of teachers' pay is effective.
- The governing body is conscientious and takes part in relevant training on good governance practice and how to interpret school data. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the progress pupils are making. They also make sure that any additional funding is spent effectively and that it makes a difference to those pupils who are eligible for support.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is a high priority in the school. Leaders have ensured that pupils have a very safe and secure environment by effectively promoting the message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding arrangements and security checks on staff are meticulous and records are secure. Staff and governors undertake regular and appropriate training, including that related to keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism.
- Thorough and very regular checks are completed on all pupils who attend alternative providers or work experience placements. Frequent visits are made by school staff and safeguarding procedures are diligently checked.
- A dedicated team of pastoral support managers oversees the care and welfare of vulnerable pupils and their families. They offer excellent support and are highly valued.
- Leaders are persistent in cases where the school is concerned for a pupil's welfare. Highly effective relationships with other agencies, and with parents, ensure that pupils are kept safe and that their welfare needs are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching and learning are outstanding because adults ensure that barriers to learning are broken down. The combination of teachers' thorough knowledge of their pupils, their unerring belief in pupils' abilities and the insistence that the package of learning offered is highly personalised enables pupils to make rapid and sustained progress. Teachers capture the interest and aspirations of each individual pupil and this is a recipe for success.

- For secondary-age pupils, the first premise of every teacher is to quickly get to know a pupil really well. They skilfully pick up what a pupil likes, what engages them and what will spark their curiosity to learn. They then put an excellent package of learning together for each pupil. They build skills and increase challenge as a pupil grows in confidence and resilience. These highly bespoke learning packages are met with an outstanding response from pupils.
- Teachers gather information for primary-aged pupils with great effect. They closely liaise with a pupil's former school to gather a full picture of their abilities and their barriers to learning. The extremely well-organised lessons balance the needs of the different ages and abilities of pupils within each class very effectively. Teachers skilfully combine developing pupils' skills and learning, such as in reading, writing and mathematics, while regularly reinforcing good behaviour and appropriate choices. Teachers and teaching assistants demonstrate exemplary skills in supporting pupils to enjoy their learning. They create a 'can-do' culture and, as a result, pupils feel they can be successful and increasingly confident learners.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Questioning is used effectively to encourage pupils to talk, draw out their thinking and help them move on in their learning. The flexibility of staff to respond to the needs of pupils is impressive. This creates a sense of there being no limit to what pupils can achieve.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work extremely well together, bringing a consistency of approach and expectation to pupils. Their deep knowledge of pupils' next steps in learning, coupled with the strong, trusting relationships that they develop with pupils, ensure that pupils feel secure enough to learn. Pupils are not afraid to get the most out of their learning experiences and activities.
- Teachers and teaching assistants' behaviour management strategies are a considerable strength. They skilfully use regular praise and encouragement to engender a positive sense of self-worth in pupils. Where needed, they deftly use distraction to intercept any off-task behaviour and quickly get pupils back on track. This approach soon puts pupils at their ease and then swiftly re-engages them back to the activity. Derogatory or inappropriate language is not tolerated.
- Teachers check on pupils' learning regularly. By continually checking individual pupils' understanding, adults make an important contribution to securing the excellent progress pupils make in English and mathematics. This is because teachers focus very precisely on what individual pupils can do and their next steps.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View or spoke with the inspector felt that their children were well taught. They felt the quality of information given to them about their children's learning was valuable and of a good quality. They appreciated the very regular contact the school had with them about their child, often via a telephone call. They remarked that it was great when they got good news about what their child had been doing.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. This is because enhancing pupils' personal development, welfare and emotional skills is considered the key to unlocking their potential. All pupils benefit from excellent daily sessions to help them develop their emotional literacy and resilience. Teachers' and other adults' deep knowledge of pupils, and the strong relationships that they build, ensure that the school provides a safe, nurturing environment in which pupils can thrive and succeed.
- Staff treat pupils with the utmost consideration and ensure that the school makes everyone feel welcome and valued. As one pupil explained: 'The only thing we all have in common is we are all different; that is what holds us together.' Diversity and difference is prominently celebrated at Three Towers. For example, the school's recent focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues not only raised awareness for pupils, but was also invaluable in supporting those pupils in school dealing with their own identity. The school is currently waiting to hear if they are going to be awarded a national award for their work on equality. Adults constantly model respectful and caring behaviour in the way they engage with pupils. As a result, pupils start to relax, feel calmer and begin to enjoy school life.
- Most parents who spoke with inspectors, and those who responded to Parent View, expressed praise for the school and the work of the staff. Parents felt their children were safe, much happier than in previous schools, and looked after well. A number of parents were keen to say that their children were thriving and the change in them was 'brilliant'. They also felt staff were dedicated and did the best for all of their children. 'My child has gone from being a misunderstood, angry, hater of school, to a child who is keen to go to school and learn' is a typical sentiment.
- The vast majority of pupils are keen, increasingly confident learners. Pupils told inspectors they liked Three Towers. Some of them say this is the first time they have liked school. As a pupil said: 'I like this school because adults take time to understand and support you.' They feel they are very well looked after by adults who are 'kind' and 'always help you learn'. Pupils were unanimous in their view that they felt safe in school and described it as a 'positive' and 'happy' place to be.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Movement around school is carefully managed by adults, so there is limited opportunity for negative situations to arise. Pupils accept and even appreciate the sense of security this brings. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils conduct themselves extremely well around school, making it mostly a calm, relaxed place to be. Staff are skilful at defusing any potential disruption. This exemplifies teachers' and support staff's strong knowledge of pupils and their confident approach to handling potentially volatile behaviour.
- The vast majority of pupils behave well; many settle into the school quickly. They feel secure enough to relax, begin to regulate their behaviour and learn strategies to help them break down the barriers their behaviour causes. However, there are some pupils

that initially find this very difficult. This is particularly the case when pupils join the school but would be better suited to another provision, or where they join the school as a group, as a result of drugs or gangs. In these instances, the school has found it very difficult to manage these pupils' behaviour. As a consequence, although the leaders have reduced the proportion of pupils who are excluded from the provision, the school's exclusion records remain too high.

- Pupils' attitudes to learning is at least good and often excellent. Pupils try their utmost to engage in lessons. The adults supporting them skilfully capture their attention and interest. Pupils value enormously the chances that they are offered to re-engage in their learning.
- In the primary phase, teachers and support staff expertly support pupils to regulate their behaviour and to find alternative ways to respond to frustration, anger and anxiety. The atmosphere in the classrooms is one of success and support. For example, while making Chinese New Year decorations, pupils were encouraged to say what they found difficult and were praised for finding positive ways to complete the tasks, without upset or annoyance. Classmates were visibly delighted with their peers' successes.
- The systems for monitoring absence are meticulous and robust. Despite the diverse nature of the provision, including home-teaching, online learning, placements at alternative providers or attendance at school, leaders can confidently account for every pupil on their register. Attendance is better in the primary phase but remains an issue in the secondary phase, although it is improving. The key stage pastoral support managers provide excellent liaison between families, the school and those professionals who offer support to those who need it. Good attendance is rewarded and has a high profile in the school. However, there is a small group of pupils who are regularly absent from school. Leaders work diligently with this group and their parents to address this issue, with some notable successes. However, a very small number of pupils still do not attend school regularly enough.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Outcomes are outstanding for the vast majority of pupils, despite starting points that are often below average.
- The school's tracking and end-of-year outcomes information show that all groups of pupils at key stages 1, 2 and 3 made at least good progress, and the vast majority, regardless of their specific needs or circumstances, made outstanding progress over time. This is confirmed by evidence in pupils' workbooks.
- Key stage 4 pupils make similarly strong progress. This is because the extremely personalised approach to learning ensures that leaders and teachers tap into pupils' interests, and then capitalise on these to create a package of courses leading to qualifications. As one pupil said: 'I never thought I would get a qualification, now I am.'
- Apart from insisting on pupils studying qualifications in English and mathematics, leaders offer a wide range of subjects, including vocational subjects. All of the courses that pupils follow contribute towards functional skills, entry level qualifications or GCSEs. All courses are determined by each individual pupil's particular interest and ambition. An impressively growing number are entered for and succeed in GCSE in

subjects such as English, mathematics, science and PE.

- From their individual starting points, disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their peers because of the effective way in which barriers to learning are broken down and the quality of support that they receive.
- The school provides good-quality careers guidance which builds on teachers' comprehensive knowledge of pupils. Teachers encourage pupils to be whatever they want to be and help them to make informed choices that support them in reaching their goals. Most pupils go on to take up a place at college; some have gone on to university. Pupils have followed careers as diverse as gardening, ceramics or in medicine and ICT. There are well-thought-out opportunities for work experience and vocational work with alternative providers, such as in a hair salon and grounds maintenance. Transitions are well organised and managed carefully so that pupils build up their confidence and the likelihood of success is maximised.

School details

Unique reference number	140627
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10042413

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

Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Alison Foster
Headteacher	Anne Isherwood
Telephone number	01942 251360
Website	www.ttapa.net
Email address	head@ttapa.net
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Three Towers is larger than the average-sized pupil referral unit. The school became an academy in February 2015. The school is part of The Rowan Learning Trust.
- Prior to the school's conversion to an academy, pupils who were educated on a number of different sites across the local authority were moved on to two main sites. One site, the Whelley campus, caters for pupils in key stages 1 and 2. The other site, the Hindley campus, offers provision for key stages 3 and 4. The school provides transport for all pupils.
- The majority of pupils in key stage 2 are dual-registered with their mainstream school and only attend the pupil referral unit on a part-time basis for a limited period of time.
- Three Towers offers places for key stages 3 and 4 pupils who have been permanently excluded, are at risk of permanent exclusion, have medical needs or are without a school place.
- The school provides education for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health

difficulties, many of whom have additional needs, such as autistic spectrum disorder.

- The school mainly serves the Wigan area. The school provides its own escorted transport and this is how most pupils arrive and leave school each day.
- The majority of key stage 2 and key stage 3 pupils have an education, health and care plan or are going through the statutory SEN assessment procedures.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very low.
- Boys considerably outnumber girls.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is higher than the national average.
- Almost all pupils join the school part-way through their education. Most pupils join the school in key stage 4.
- The school uses alternative providers, as well as offering home-teaching and online learning packages to complement the education it offers to pupils on the main sites. The alternative providers currently being used are Tyler Lee Hair Company, Apple Cast Northwest, IT Way, Carrington Horse Riding Centre and FixIT.
- The staff working with key stage 2 pupils and pupils with medical needs have given support to other schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in classes. They observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and assessed the school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Inspectors also observed pupils during lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books, in their assessment files and case studies.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, assistant headteachers and the heads of department. They also spoke with pastoral managers and the person responsible for safeguarding checks.
- An inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair. She also met with the executive headteacher and the chief executive officer of The Rowan Learning Trust.
- Inspectors took account of 10 responses to Ofsted's pupils' questionnaire and spoke with two small groups of pupils to discuss their opinions about the school and their learning. Inspectors also spoke informally with pupils around the school.
- Inspectors took account of the 26 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke informally with staff.
- They also took account of the four responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. An inspector spoke briefly with a few parents on the telephone.
- An inspector also spoke with a small representative sample of alternative providers and schools with which the academy has worked.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including: minutes from meetings of the governing body; information on pupils' progress; the school's evaluation of its own performance and its development plan. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Linda Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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