

Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy

4–6 Park Grove, Manchester M19 3AQ

Inspection dates

5–7 June 2018

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in English and mathematics is variable.
- Leaders' systems for recording assessment and tracking do not cover a wide range of subjects.
- Teachers do not seek to deepen pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills consistently enough.
- The work that teachers plan for pupils in English and mathematics is not consistently demanding.
- Recent improvements in pupils' progress in mathematics are not sufficiently established.
- Pupils do not apply their skills in English and mathematics across a wide enough range of other subjects.
- Pupils do not consistently show pride in their work.
- Pupils sometimes display a lack of interest in their work and lose some learning time because of it.
- Pupils' rate of absence is above the national average.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher is highly capable and has a secure understanding of the school's areas for development.
- The proprietor and leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Pupils feel safe and well supported because of the care and guidance they receive from adults.
- There has been rapid improvement in pupils' behaviour because of leaders' actions.
- There are now robust systems for checking on teachers' performance, which contribute to the improving quality of teaching and learning.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. This plays a significant part in pupils' strong personal development and welfare.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching and learning to secure more rapid progress in English and mathematics by:
 - continuing with leaders' current strategies to improve the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that teachers routinely seek to probe pupils' understanding and deepen their learning
 - making sure that teachers consistently plan lessons that are sufficiently demanding and that interest and engage pupils, so as to maximise their learning
 - ensuring that pupils routinely apply the skills they learn in English and mathematics to other subjects.
- Further strengthen leadership and management by refining the school's assessment and tracking systems so that leaders have a clearer view of pupils' progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Fully establish the school's strategies to encourage pupils to take greater pride in their work.
- Persist with the school's actions to encourage good attendance, with a view to raising attendance up to the national average.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has been in post since January 2018. In that time, she and the proprietor have been relentless in their drive to ensure that pupils receive the best possible support and education at the school. This is evident in, for example, better behaviour and attitudes among pupils. Leaders have also made improvements to the school premises, so that pupils have a welcoming place to come to learn. Leaders have managed considerable upheaval in staffing and other matters recently. They have taken decisive action in this regard and, as a result, there is now greater stability.
- The proprietor and leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards and other requirements are met.
- The headteacher is very capable and has a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. She has captured these effectively in precise school improvement plans and an honest self-evaluation of the school. She has rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. She has put in place thorough processes for checking on the quality of teaching and she provides regular guidance and training to teachers on how to strengthen their performance.
- There has been rapid improvement in several areas as a consequence of leaders' actions. Pupils' behaviour has improved greatly since the last inspection. In consultation with members of staff, the headteacher has introduced 'stepped sanctions', which reflect the high expectations that staff have of pupils' behaviour. She has also changed the school's philosophy on the behaviour that warrants exclusion. As a result, there has been a large reduction in the number of exclusions in recent times. Leaders manage the exclusions that do occur in an appropriate manner.
- The actions the headteacher has taken have also resulted in improvements in teaching and in the progress pupils make, especially in, for example, science and art. Progress in mathematics has also recently been stronger, as pupils make use of their skills in problem-solving and reasoning. However, there is still some variability in teaching and outcomes in mathematics and English, since the new strategies have not bedded in across all subjects.
- The headteacher has revised the school's assessment and tracking systems. They now provide a clearer picture of the amount of progress pupils make in core subjects. However, leaders recognise that the systems do not currently cover the full range of subjects on offer.
- The headteacher has introduced more-robust processes for checking on the quality of teaching. She provides weekly general updates to staff about expectations of teaching. She also keeps a running log of her monitoring activities, such as the scrutiny of pupils' work and visits to lessons. She provides guidance on areas to improve and makes sure that she follows up to see if staff are acting on her recommendations. The headteacher's actions have a direct influence on the improvements in teaching and learning that have taken place so far.
- The school provides a suitably broad and balanced curriculum, which effectively supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as their understanding of

fundamental British values. Leaders have established a set of school values that they thread through all pupils' learning and experiences, which reflect many of the British values, such as respect. The curriculum also includes lessons in citizenship and personal, social, health and economic education, which contribute effectively to pupils' development.

- In discussions with the inspector, leaders of two schools which refer pupils to Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy expressed very positive views of the work of the school. They presented case studies of pupils who had benefited from their short-term placements, showing improved attitudes and progress on their return to their main school.
- The two parents with whom the inspector spoke by telephone were very supportive of the school and expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their children's experiences there. No parents or carers expressed any concerns.
- Evidence from responses to the staff survey and from discussion with staff shows that they appreciate the training that leaders provide. They feel committed to their work at the school and say that leaders do all they can to manage their workload.

Governance

- There are no governors in the school. There is a management committee, which has responsibility for overseeing standards and holding the headteacher to account. There has been improvement in the work of this committee since the last inspection. They now have a secure understanding of the school's priorities.
- The management committee members ensure that they hold the headteacher rigorously to account. They do this by, for example, setting detailed targets as part of their appraisal of the headteacher's performance, which focus closely on improving pupils' progress. There is also a 'standards adviser' on the committee, who holds regular meetings with the headteacher to ensure that she carries out recommended actions to secure continuing improvement. Leaders show ambition in their work to provide an improved quality of education and care for pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is an appropriate safeguarding policy on the school's website, which takes into account all the government's current requirements.
- Procedures to report concerns about pupils are robust. Records are detailed and leaders promptly follow up issues as necessary. The proprietor is the designated safeguarding lead and is knowledgeable about her duties.
- Actions by leaders over time have created a very safe environment. Staff are well trained in safeguarding. They use their deep knowledge of pupils to watch for any unusual behaviours that may indicate concerns.
- Leaders are acutely aware of particular safeguarding issues that are prominent in the locality, such as knife crime and gang culture. They ensure that they educate and inform pupils who are especially vulnerable to these issues. They also ensure that staff have

relevant safeguarding training to cover these matters.

- Leaders are keen to maintain a high level of vigilance and constantly look for new ways to ensure pupils' safety at all times. For example, they have recently acquired electronic wands to detect weapons, such as knives.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Although there is evidence of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in some areas, this is not consistent enough to have raised the overall quality of teaching to good. Consequently, pupils' progress in mathematics and English still requires improvement overall. Instability in staffing, which leaders have now addressed, has contributed to this.
- Teachers typically have strong subject knowledge and there has been an improvement since the last inspection in the way they match work to pupils' abilities and needs. However, this is not consistent across all subjects.
- Teachers do not consistently seek to deepen pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, although teachers' questions are effective in encouraging pupils to think hard in science, in mathematics, teachers' questioning is only now beginning to develop pupils' ability to use their reasoning skills and to justify their responses.
- Teachers now plan some work for pupils which is more demanding of their various needs and abilities. However, this is inconsistent in mathematics and English. For example, in mathematics, until very recently, pupils completed work that was too simple for their age and ability. There is now a greater level of challenge in the tasks teachers set. In English, there is evidence of work on aspects of grammar, for example, that is more appropriate to pupils at lower key stage 2 and is, therefore, not demanding enough.
- Teachers provide some opportunities for pupils to apply the skills they learn in English and mathematics in some other subjects, such as science and citizenship. However, this is not evident across a wide enough range.
- Teachers have appropriate expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. They manage behaviour effectively, given the needs of the pupils and the reasons for their referral to the school. They secure mostly positive attitudes to learning, using encouragement and praise in a carefully targeted way.
- Staff follow the school's recently revised feedback and assessment procedures appropriately.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe in school because leaders have created warm relationships and a climate of trust. Pupils feel confident to speak to adults if they have a concern, and know that adults will help and support them.
- Pupils are aware of safety issues, such as the risks associated with the internet. They have a strong knowledge of those safeguarding issues related to the community in which

they live because staff give them the information they need to stay safe.

- Pupils benefit from well-planned careers guidance, information and advice. Leaders ensure the independence of this advice by the use of external consultants and agencies. Pupils in key stage 4 receive personal action plans to help them with careers decisions.
- The school's curriculum and key values encourage respect for all, regardless of their different characteristics. Pupils showed little evidence of disrespectful attitudes during the inspection. They also feel that the school is a supportive place and they learn more effectively there than in their main school.
- Leaders have introduced strategies to improve pupils' pride in their work, such as displaying work of suitable quality and providing rewards. However, there is still some variability in how much pride pupils take in the presentation of their work.
- Pupils in the alternative provision benefit from effective safeguarding processes. The premises are secure and safe. Staff at the alternative provision report absences to the school promptly and leaders take rapid action to ensure that absentees are safe.
- Leaders at the school and staff in the alternative provision closely cooperate to ensure that learning meets pupils' needs and contributes effectively to their development. Examples include sports and practical technology projects, such as making bird-boxes. The manager of the alternative provision is also a member of the school's management committee and regularly attends meetings to monitor the quality of the overall educational provision for pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils mostly display good conduct and mainly positive attitudes to learning. Staff are effective at managing any misbehaviour, which is usually connected to the behaviours that resulted in their referral to the school.
- Pupils who spoke with the inspector said they enjoy the rewards for good behaviour they receive over time. These include opportunities to go rock climbing or go-karting, for instance.
- There is very little lost learning time for others through low-level disruption. However, there are a few occasions when pupils disengage from their work. Staff typically manage these occurrences well and expect pupils to make up for any work they miss as a result of their reluctance to participate.
- Leaders have a number of strategies to ensure that pupils attend school as frequently as possible. These include a phone call to the pupil's parent as soon as staff confirm an absence and rewards in school for high attendance. There is convincing evidence that leaders improve pupils' attendance when compared to that at the schools that refer them. Case studies indicate marked improvements for some individuals, such as a reduction in the rate of absence from over 98% to about 12%. Nevertheless, the school's absence rate is above the national average.
- Pupils who attend the alternative provision behave well, showing appropriate respect to adults.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- There is a constantly changing population of pupils at the school, as they typically attend for relatively short periods to receive support with behavioural and emotional difficulties. Leaders have now developed more reliable methods to establish their ability on entry, which is typically low. Evidence from books, and the school's own assessment information, shows that pupils make considerable progress in some subjects, such as art and science. However, pupils' progress in English and mathematics still requires improvement as it is not swift enough.
- Stronger progress has been evident more recently in mathematics, as pupils now have more frequent opportunities to develop their skills in solving problems and reasoning. However, it is still too soon to see consistently strong progress.
- Most pupils make expected or better progress in reading from their various starting points, although they are typically below the expected standard for their age. Pupils read with a fluency that is consistent with their ability. They use their reading skills effectively to perform tasks such as reviewing other pupils' work in English or finding out about fossils in science. Leaders have also recently created a new library area, with an attractive array of suitable books, to develop pupils' breadth of reading.
- Most pupils leave with some qualifications, including in English and mathematics, though grades are mainly low. The number of pupils undertaking qualifications is typically below five, as most pupils return to their main school to complete their education following their placement.
- The curriculum is broad and leaders provide a balanced range of qualifications for pupils to match their variety of needs. These include GCSEs in English and mathematics, as well as qualifications in employability and construction. These help the small number of pupils who stay at the school until they leave at the end of Year 11 to be prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 142224 |
| DfE registration number | 352/6011 |
| Inspection number | 10048619 |

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school | Other independent school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 22 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Ms Mahfuza Aktar |
| Headteacher | Mrs Linda Guest |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £10,725 |
| Telephone number | 0161 225 0567 |
| Website | www.mvla.co.uk |
| Email address | head@mvla.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 11–12 May 2016 |

Information about this school

- Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy is an independent day school.
- The school is located in the Levenshulme district of Manchester, about three miles southeast of the city centre.
- The school is registered with the Department for Education as a mixed school to cater for the needs of up to 24 pupils between 11 and 16 years.
- Many pupils have behavioural and emotional needs, so the school aims to provide a caring environment where pupils can realise their potential.
- There are no pupils with an education, health and care plan.

- The school does not receive pupil premium funding or Year 7 catch-up funding.
- All the pupils in the school have dual registration. This means that they are registered with a mainstream school but attend the school on a temporary basis to receive their education.
- The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- All pupils attending the school receive their education on-site and at the nearby alternative provision, Manchester Vocational Training Centre, which is separately managed.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out a range of activities, including a tour of the school site and a visit to the alternative provision that the school uses, to check that the school complies with the independent school standards.
- The inspector observed teaching across the school and scrutinised work in pupils' books.
- The inspector observed the behaviour of pupils in lessons and during lunchtime.
- The inspector held discussions with the proprietor, who is responsible for child protection and safeguarding, the headteacher and other members of staff. The inspector also had a formal meeting with a group of seven pupils and spoke informally with others.
- The inspector held a meeting with members of the school's management committee.
- There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. The inspector contacted a small number of parents by telephone to ascertain their views about the school. All five members of staff, other than the headteacher, gave the inspector written responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupils' survey.
- The inspector held telephone conversations with senior leaders from two secondary schools which have referred pupils to Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy.
- The inspector examined school policies to check that they are compliant with the independent school standards and to provide additional information for the inspection.
- The inspector reviewed the school's records of pupils' attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. The inspector also considered the school's information about pupils' attainment and progress.

Inspection team

Mark Quinn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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