

# Inspection of Darwen Aldridge Community Academy

Sudell Road, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 3HD

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Inspection dates: 14 and 15 December 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Sixth-form provision

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Good

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is a school at the heart of its local community. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, feel safe, happy and well looked after. They know that leaders and staff care for them, and they know who to speak to if they are worried.

Pupils and students are proud that their school is welcoming and that everyone is treated equally. They told inspectors that they rarely hear sexist or homophobic language in school.

Pupils value the improvements that leaders are making to their school. For example, most pupils' conduct is improving rapidly. Pupils and students are polite and respectful to staff and to each other. Poor behaviour rarely disrupts learning.

When pupils and students report bullying, leaders tackle it effectively. However, some pupils lack confidence that staff will deal with bullying well. These pupils are sometimes reluctant to report their concerns.

Leaders have raised their expectations of what pupils and students can achieve academically. Students in the sixth form achieve well. However, leaders' work to improve the curriculum in key stages 3 and 4 is at an earlier stage of development. In some subjects, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Some pupils and students appreciate the extra-curricular clubs on offer, for example football, netball and yoga.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

In recent months, leaders, governors and trustees have acted to strengthen the leadership of the school at every level. Leaders are clear about the actions that they need to take to secure the further improvements needed. Most pupils, staff, parents and carers are confident that the school is on a strong trajectory of improvement. However, leaders have made many changes for the better recently and it remains early days.

Leaders are determined for pupils and students to succeed academically. Leaders have taken appropriate action to redesign the curriculum so that it is suitably ambitious for pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils and students study a suitably broad range of subjects.

In the sixth form and in some subjects in key stages 3 and 4, leaders have carefully organised the knowledge that pupils should learn. That said, in several other subjects in key stages 3 and 4, leaders are still finalising what they want pupils to learn and when teachers should deliver this content. This means that some teachers are not clear enough about what they should be teaching and when this knowledge should be taught. This hinders how well pupils learn in these subjects.

In subjects where the curriculum is well designed, and in the sixth form, teachers explain new learning clearly to pupils and students. Mostly, teachers have a strong knowledge of their subjects. Leaders ensure that teachers can develop further their own subject expertise. This helps teachers to design learning well for pupils and students.

Mostly, teachers are quick to identify pupils' misconceptions before moving on. That said, some teachers do not use assessment strategies sufficiently well to pinpoint the gaps in pupils' learning. This means that some pupils do not have a secure enough understanding of important content. In the sixth form, teachers use assessment strategies consistently well to identify and address students' misconceptions.

In recent months, leaders have acted to provide appropriate support for those younger pupils who struggle with reading. However, leaders' systems to identify weaker readers do not extend to pupils in key stage 4. Some pupils who struggle to read with confidence, especially those in key stage 4, do not get the support that they need to catch up quickly with their reading.

Leaders have put systems in place to accurately identify the needs of pupils and students with SEND. Leaders provide teachers with appropriate information about the needs of these pupils. Teachers use this information increasingly well to adapt how they deliver the curriculum for pupils with SEND.

Leaders have raised their expectations of pupils' conduct. Pupils told inspectors that they understand what is expected of them more clearly than in the past. As a result, most pupils behave well. Leaders and staff deal with poor behaviour swiftly so that learning is not often disrupted.

Some pupils do not attend school often enough. This is particularly the case for some disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. This hinders how well these pupils learn the curriculum. Leaders are in the process of helping these pupils and their families to understand the importance of coming to school regularly. In the sixth form, students attend well.

Leaders have thought carefully about the personal development curriculum for pupils and students. For instance, leaders ensure that pupils and students learn about healthy relationships and respect for others. Pupils and students in Years 7 to 13 access a well-thought-out careers programme. Students in the sixth form are prepared well for adult life. For example, they learn about budgeting and to manage their own finances. They also receive appropriate support with their university and apprenticeship applications.

Trust and school leaders have prioritised listening to staff concerns. Staff told inspectors that they feel increasingly well supported and that leaders are mindful of their well-being. However, a minority of staff reported concerns about their workload.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a culture of vigilance and care. Staff are well trained to notice any signs that may indicate that a pupil or student may be at risk of harm. Staff are clear about the procedures that they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil.

When needed, leaders take appropriate action to ensure that pupils, students and their families get the help that they need in a timely way. Leaders have fostered strong links with external agencies, such as the police and the local authority.

Through the curriculum, pupils and students learn about how to keep themselves safe. For example, they learn about the dangers of alcohol and drug misuse.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In some subjects, in key stages 3 and 4, leaders are still finalising their curriculum thinking. This means that, in these subjects, teachers are not sufficiently clear about what they should be teaching and when this content should be taught. This hinders how well pupils learn. Leaders should ensure that they are clear about what they want pupils to know, and in what order teachers should deliver learning for pupils.
- In key stages 3 and 4, some teachers do not use assessment strategies sufficiently well to identify and address the gaps in pupils' knowledge. This means that some pupils do not have the knowledge that they need for subsequent learning. Leaders should ensure that teachers are supported to use assessment strategies consistently well so that staff rectify pupils' misconceptions and address forgotten learning.
- Some pupils in key stage 3 and 4 do not attend school as often as they should. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND. As a result, some pupils miss out on important learning. Leaders should ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, attend school regularly.
- Some pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge, particularly those in key stage 4, do not receive the support that they need to catch up. This hinders them in learning the intended curriculum and prevents them from achieving as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that the reading interventions that they have introduced recently help pupils, including pupils in key stage 4, to catch up with their reading quickly.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135580
<b>Local authority</b>	Blackburn with Darwen
<b>Inspection number</b>	10226342
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1133
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	112
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Rob Wye
<b>Headteacher</b>	Claire Bailey
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.daca.uk.com">www.daca.uk.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	23 May 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is part of Aldridge Education multi-academy trust.
- The current headteacher was appointed in June 2022. A large number of staff were newly appointed in September 2022.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers for some pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector also met with members of the local governing committee, trustees and officers of the trust, including the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, design and technology, and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils and students about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' and students' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils and students from Years 7 to 13 about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document, leaders' improvement plans, minutes of trust board meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- The lead inspector spoke with representatives of the local authority by telephone.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the staff responsible for safeguarding and scrutinised the single central record. Inspectors considered leaders' safeguarding processes and procedures. Inspectors discussed matters relating to safeguarding with pupils, students and staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff, pupils and students.

## Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Alan Hammersley	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Meldrum	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Edmondson	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Wood	Ofsted Inspector

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