

Inspection of Great Academy Ashton

Broadoak Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire OL6 8RF

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Great Academy Ashton are part of a diverse and welcoming community. Pupils and staff rightly identify it as an improving school. They recognise and appreciate the changes taken to improve their experiences at the school.

Leaders have ambition and high expectations for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged. Pupils benefit from a broad and varied curriculum. However, there is inconsistency in the teaching of the planned curriculum which means that some pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Most pupils enjoy attending the school and are happy. However, some pupils' behaviour in lessons and during social times is not dealt with consistently well by some staff. As a result, some pupils' experience of school is less positive than it should be. The majority of pupils who communicated with inspectors feel safe at the school, but they said that the conduct of the minority makes some pupils feel unsafe at times. When pupils report bullying and name-calling, leaders take effective action.

Pupils appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs on offer; for example, debating society, trampolining club and garden club. They have lots of opportunities to get involved in the wider life of the school, through charity and leadership roles. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about being charity ambassadors and working positively with the wider community.

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

Leaders, together with the trust, have a clear vision for improving the quality of education. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have redesigned the curriculum to ensure it is sufficiently ambitious for all pupils, including those with SEND. Improvements in the curriculum mean that more pupils are being encouraged to take the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects.

Subject leaders have thought carefully about the logical order in which they introduce pupils to new concepts and vocabulary. They have clearly identified the building blocks of knowledge that they want pupils to learn over time. Leaders make sure that teachers are clear about the essential knowledge that pupils should learn.

Subject leaders recognise the importance of pupils being able to link their prior knowledge to new information and have received training on teaching strategies and assessment methods. However, subject leaders have not in turn set out the teaching strategies and assessment methods that they want teachers to use. Although teachers have good subject knowledge, not all teachers select activities that best deliver the curriculum as intended. Furthermore, teachers do not adapt their teaching to address misconceptions swiftly. This means that they do not ensure that

all pupils have secure understanding of key concepts before moving on to new learning.

Furthermore, subject leaders have not set out the assessment methods that teachers should use to check that pupils are secure in what they have learned over time. As gaps in pupils' knowledge are not always picked up, some pupils struggle to make sustained progress. This sometimes goes unnoticed because subject leaders' systems to check on the quality of the curriculum have not been sufficiently focused on how well teachers deliver subject content. This has prevented some pupils from learning as much as they should.

Pupils benefit extensively from the new library placed at the heart of the school. They engage with activities that promote a love and enjoyment of reading. Leaders have identified that some pupils have gaps in their reading and comprehension skills. Effective programmes of support help pupils to catch up with their peers. However, this support is not developed well enough for pupils in key stage 4 to help them to catch up quickly with their peers. This hinders their progress through the curriculum.

Pupils with SEND are fully involved in all aspects of school life and take part in all the school has to offer. Leaders quickly and accurately identify the needs of this group of pupils. They give staff the information that they need to adapt the delivery of the same ambitious curriculum. This helps to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are met in the classroom.

Most classrooms are orderly and purposeful. Typically, pupils are engaged and want to learn. That said, low-level disruption impacts negatively on learning in some lessons. There are also occasions when a minority of pupils cause disruption around the school site. Too many pupils truant from lessons. Based on the 'GREAT' values of the school, the behaviour policy is well understood by staff and pupils. However, some staff do not follow the protocols for managing pupils' poor behaviour consistently enough. Leaders recognise that more needs to be done to ensure the behaviour policy is applied consistently by staff.

Leaders place personal development at the heart of the school's work. Pupils have access to an extensive programme of pastoral support and guidance. Through personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, pupils are well prepared for growing up in modern Britain. They learn about respect for other cultures, faiths and perspectives. Pupils value the opportunity to debate important topics through mock trials and 'young politicians'. Leaders provide opportunities that broaden pupils' horizons and develop pupils as responsible citizens.

Pupils receive high-quality careers advice that informs them well to make decisions about their next steps. Pupils value the experience they gain from careers fairs and meeting with local colleges and apprenticeship providers. Almost all pupils progress to education, employment or training.

Trust leaders, together with the governing body and senior leaders, have brought about significant improvements in a short time. However, they are aware that the school needs to improve further. They have set clear priorities for improvement linked to the curriculum and behaviour management.

Many staff enjoy working at the school and are appreciative of how leaders are considerate of their well-being and workload, while trying to bring about positive change.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff are well trained to be able to identify safeguarding concerns. Staff at all levels are alert to the risks that pupils may face. They know how to report any concerns that they may have about a pupil's welfare.

Leaders are adept at working with a wide range of external agencies. They are persistent in securing the right support for vulnerable pupils and their families.

Pupils are taught about risks, such as sexual harassment and why it is wrong. They know how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Leaders offer enrichment activities to target specific risks relevant to the local community. Pupils said they know who they can speak to if they are feeling anxious or worried.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is inconsistency in how middle leaders have set out how the curriculum should be implemented. As a result, teachers do not always plan activities that are consistently matched well to subject content, so pupils do not achieve as well as they should. This variation is not systematically addressed by middle leaders. Senior leaders and the trust must ensure and assure themselves that middle leaders can accurately evaluate the quality of provision, so it continues to improve.
- Some teachers do not routinely check what all pupils know and remember. This means that some gaps in learning are not identified as quickly as they could be. Leaders should ensure that assessment strategies are used effectively in lessons so that pupils are able to learn and move through the curriculum securely.
- Leaders do not systematically identify weaker readers in Year 11. This means that some pupils do not receive the additional reading support that they need to catch up with their peers. Leaders should ensure that teachers identify pupils in Year 11 who are falling behind and help them to read fluently, accurately and with good comprehension.

- Behaviour systems are not consistently applied by some staff. Some pupils do not follow the school rules and cause disruption as a result. Leaders should support staff at all levels to consistently apply the behaviour policy.

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

Unique reference number	135508
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	10268239
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,308
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Jones
Chief Executive Officer	Brendan Loughran
Principal	David Waugh
Website	www.gaa.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 and 26 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Great Academies Education Trust in January 2015.
- Leaders use five registered alternative providers and one unregistered alternative provider for a very small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement 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 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 other members of staff. They also spoke with members of the trust and the local governing body.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of evidence, including leaders' self-evaluation documents, improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and the single central record. They met with leaders, staff and pupils to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, mathematics, history, modern foreign languages and computer science. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and the responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Kate Bowker, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Kevin Sexton	Ofsted Inspector
Neil Johnson	Ofsted Inspector
Rachel Goodwin	His Majesty's Inspector

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