

# Inspection of The Valley Leadership Academy

Fearns Moss, Bacup, Lancashire OL13 0TG

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Inspection dates: 19 and 20 September 2023

## **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**

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The principal of this school is Colette Roberts. This school is part of Star Academies Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Hamid Patel, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Kamruddin Kothia.

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

Pupils recognise that many aspects of their school have improved in recent years. Those who have been at the school the longest told inspectors about the changes that they have experienced, for example how they feel safer from bullying and more confident that staff will listen to their concerns.

Most pupils are happy at school. They value the positive relationships that they have with staff. A small minority of older pupils are taking longer to meet the school's expectations of their behaviour. At times, some do not treat their peers with respect. Learning sometimes suffers as a result.

The trust has helped the school to raise its expectations of what pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), can achieve. This is helping many pupils to feel motivated to do well. However, in many subjects, the school's actions to strengthen the curriculum have not had enough time to take effect. There is still work to be done for pupils to benefit fully from these improvements. As a result of this, many pupils still do not achieve as highly as they should.

Many pupils enjoy participating in a wide variety of enriching clubs and activities. For example, pupils can learn kick-boxing, practise trampolining or join in with the baking club.

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

Since this school joined a multi-academy trust in 2019, support from the trust leadership has helped the school to improve. Recently, this help has focused on strengthening the curriculum. All levels of leadership now share an ambitious vision for the provision of a high-quality education. Growing numbers of pupils, including pupils with SEND, are studying the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects at key stage 4.

In most subjects, the curriculum is carefully designed. It is clear exactly what pupils should learn and in what order. Despite this, some staff do not deliver the curriculum as effectively as they could. At times, they choose approaches that are not well matched to the knowledge that pupils must learn. Added to this, some staff do not use assessment strategies purposefully enough. This makes it difficult for them to tell whether pupils have learned what they should before moving on.

The school has systems for identifying any additional needs that pupils may have. Staff are provided with detailed information about these needs. They are beginning to use this information to help them to adapt their delivery of the curriculum. Support from the school is helping pupils with SEND to access appropriately ambitious next steps in their education.

Typically, the school is quick to identify pupils who find reading difficult. However, the systems for supporting these pupils are in their infancy. Some of the weakest readers in key stage 3 are beginning to improve. Other pupils, especially those already in key stage 4, have not benefited from effective support. This places a barrier in the way of their achievement.

Recently, the school has begun to establish higher expectations of pupils' conduct. Although some parents are unhappy about these changes, pupils and staff said that behaviour has begun to improve as a result. However, in some lessons, pupils still experience disruption to their learning. The school's new approaches to managing this disruption are not applied evenly by staff. Added to this, some of the most vulnerable pupils miss too many of their lessons.

The school has begun to engage positively with parents and carers in order to address these issues. Proactive support for families is helping to forge stronger links between school and the community. Parents and carers are choosing this school in greater numbers than in the past. They value the changes that the trust has brought to the school.

A comprehensive personal development programme ensures that pupils are well prepared for their lives beyond school. For example, pupils learn about the importance of treating everybody with respect. Pupils also benefit from a well-considered careers programme. They are well informed when they make decisions about their next steps.

At times, governors' analysis of the school has been too generous. This has hindered their oversight of the school's performance and slowed the pace of improvements.

Staff are positive about recent changes in the school. They appreciate how these changes are communicated through regular training. Staff feel well supported at this school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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

- Some teachers have not been sufficiently well supported to design learning and to select activities which are matched to the knowledge that pupils need to learn. This hinders some pupils in learning the curriculum as well as they should. The school should ensure that teachers receive appropriate subject-specific guidance to support them to deliver the curriculum consistently well.
- Some teachers are not clear enough about the knowledge that pupils need for subsequent learning. They do not use assessment strategies well enough to

check that this prior learning is secure before introducing new content. As a result, pupils' learning does not build securely on what they already know. The school should ensure that teachers use assessment strategies effectively to identify and address any missed or forgotten learning.

- Some pupils who find reading more difficult, particularly those in key stage 4, do not receive timely and effective support. This hinders their access to the curriculum and prevents them from achieving as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that the reading interventions they have recently introduced are prioritised to the pupils who need the most help.
- A number of pupils are absent from school too often. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. As a result, some pupils miss out on important learning. The school should continue to engage positively with parents in order to help these pupils to attend school regularly.
- Some staff do not apply the school's systems to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. This means that some pupils' learning is disrupted by the behaviour of a small proportion of their peers. The school should ensure that staff implement the new behaviour policy consistently well so that these pupils are supported to develop positive attitudes and appropriate self-control.

## 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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	147018
<b>Local authority</b>	Lancashire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10290355
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	585
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Kamruddin Kothia OBE
<b>CEO of trust</b>	Hamid Patel CBE
<b>Principal</b>	Colette Roberts
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thevalleyleadershipacademy.com">www.thevalleyleadershipacademy.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The Valley Leadership Academy opened in September 2019 as part of Star Academies Multi-Academy Trust. When its predecessor school, Fearn Community Sports College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be inadequate overall.
- The current principal was appointed in September 2022. Since then, several other senior and middle leaders have also been appointed.
- Leaders make use of three registered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector also met with the chair of the local accountability board, and with officers of the trust, including the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history, geography and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils 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 local accountability board meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils and staff.

## Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Kevin Sexton	Ofsted Inspector
Andy Burton	Ofsted Inspector

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