

Inspection of Darwen Vale High School

Blackburn Road, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 0AL

Inspection dates: 30 to 31 January 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Matthew Little. This school is part of Aldridge Education trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Jane Fletcher, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Rupert Nichols.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are made to feel welcome at Darwen Vale High School. They settle into school quickly and forge strong friendships with their peers. Pupils appreciate the support that they receive from their teachers. This helps pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to feel safe and happy.

Typically, pupils are respectful to each other. The school and the trust have reinforced new behaviour routines through their 'Vale values' programme. Most pupils understand and adhere to these routines. This has helped the school to cultivate a calm and purposeful learning environment.

Pupils have benefited from the rapid improvements made to the curriculum. The trust and the school have set high expectations of what pupils should achieve. Pupils have responded well to these raised standards. They engage positively in their learning and many achieve well.

Pupils, including those with SEND, appreciate the range of clubs and activities that enrich their experiences. For example, pupils enjoy taking part in house competitions and sporting events. This encourages pupils to work as a team and fosters a sense of community.

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

With the support from the trust, the school has strengthened the curriculum design. It has raised the profile of many subjects such as geography and modern foreign languages in key stage 3. This has improved the take up of English Baccalaureate suite of subjects at key stage 4. This means that more pupils are accessing a broad and balanced curriculum than previously.

The trust and the local governing committee have worked collaboratively with the school to enhance the delivery of the curriculum. Teachers value the school's coaching and co-planning programme. These opportunities support the management of their workload and encourage collaboration when designing learning activities. As a result, most teachers are equipped with strong subject knowledge and useful teaching strategies. As such, in most subjects, pupils learn new content well.

The school has successfully refined its systems to identify any additional needs that pupils may have. Many teachers understand these needs well. They are adept at tailoring their lessons to ensure that the curriculum is accessed successfully by pupils with SEND. Nevertheless, in some subjects, teachers do not adapt their teaching effectively enough. This leaves a small number of pupils with SEND not achieving as well as they should.

Pupils who struggle with reading are identified swiftly. Staff know the specific gaps in pupils' reading knowledge. This helps them to design successful programmes of support so that these pupils can read with greater fluency and accuracy. However,

the support for some pupils, especially those in key stage 4, is not effective enough. This means that some older pupils do not develop their reading knowledge as quickly as they should.

The school has been successful in bringing about improvements to pupils' behaviour since the previous inspection. Teachers use the new behaviour systems consistently well to deal with poor behaviour. These approaches are securing improvements in pupils' attitude and conduct. Lessons are rarely disrupted.

Attendance is a high priority for the trust and the school. Appropriate action is taken to tackle the low attendance of pupils, especially those with SEND. The school is working effectively with families and external agencies to understand and remove the barriers that cause pupils to be absent. Such work is reducing the rate of pupil absences.

The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum is carefully structured and delivered well. Pupils know about keeping healthy and maintaining good physical and mental health. They are equipped with age-appropriate information about taking responsibility for the relationships that they forge online and offline.

The school encourages pupils to engage with charitable work such as raising money for a local hospice. This promotes pupils' willingness to serve the community and help others.

The school has mapped out a wide range of extra-curricular experiences. For instance, some pupils attend team building residential trips and various rewards activities. However, the opportunities to expand pupils' knowledge beyond the curriculum is limited. Some pupils do not receive sufficient experiences to learn about the wider world and different cultures. As a result, some pupils' knowledge of life beyond the classroom is less secure.

Pupils are prepared sufficiently well for their career pathways. For instance, the school engages with local employers to deliver industry days and visits. Pupils are better informed about the world of work. The rate of pupils entering education, employment and training has improved over time.

The trust and the local governing committee are aware of their roles and responsibilities. They ensure that they challenge and support the school when driving improvements. Over recent years, they have reviewed and refined the school's policies and systems to improve how well pupils behave and achieve.

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 do not consider the needs of some pupils with SEND well enough when delivering the curriculum. As a result, these pupils do not receive sufficient support to help them to achieve well. The school should ensure that the teachers use the information about pupils with SEND effectively when adapting teaching activities so that pupils with SEND access the curriculum successfully and achieve well.
- For a small number of pupils, the support that they receive to help them overcome gaps in their reading knowledge is not effective. This means that some pupils are not able to read with sufficient fluency and accuracy to access the curriculum. The school should enhance its systems to support those pupils who need help to overcome their reading difficulties so that they are well equipped for their learning across the curriculum.
- The opportunities to expand pupils' knowledge of life beyond the classroom is not designed as well as it should be. This means that some pupils develop limited knowledge of different cultures and the wider world. The school should ensure that pupils gain a richer insight into the modern world in which they live.

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

Unique reference number	141321
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10294380
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,085
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Rupert Nichols
CEO of the trust	Jane Fletcher
Principal	Matthew Little
Website	www.darwenvale.com
Date of previous inspection	22 September 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Aldridge Education multi-academy trust.
- The school uses three registered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- The school provides after-school care for 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.
- The inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the CEO of the trust, the school’s principal, senior leaders and subject leaders. Inspectors met with a range of other staff and leaders during the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke with representatives of the local governing committee and board of trustees, including the chair of trustees. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority and the alternative provider.
- The inspectors observed pupils’ behaviour during social times and during movement around the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, English, art and design, French and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders and teachers, visited a sample of lessons, reviewed samples of pupils’ work and spoke with some pupils.
- Inspectors also met with subject leaders to review other areas of the curriculum.
- Inspectors spoke with the leaders responsible for personal development, pupil premium, behaviour and attendance, alternative provision, early career teachers, careers, SEND and reading.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including leaders’ self-evaluation, attendance and behaviour records.
- 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted’s online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Amina Modan, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Stephen Ruddy	Ofsted Inspector
Derek Yarwood	Ofsted Inspector
Paula Crawley	Ofsted Inspector

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