Inspection of Dixons Fazakerley Academy

Sherwoods Lane, Fazakerley, Liverpool, Merseyside L10 1LB

Inspection dates:	24 and 25 April 2024

Overall effectiveness	**Requires improvement**
The quality of education	**Requires improvement**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Requires improvement**
Personal development	**Requires improvement**
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 Chris Wilson. This school is part of Dixons Academies 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), Luke Sparkes, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mike Blackburn.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils recognise that their school has been through a period of significant change. They told inspectors that they value the recent improvements that the school has made. For example, most pupils' behaviour is improving rapidly. This is helping pupils to feel safer and happier at school than they did in the past.

Most pupils act respectfully towards each other. A minority of pupils spoke to inspectors about the derogatory language that they experience from their peers. This undermines the positive culture that the school is developing. When pupils report bullying or discrimination, the school usually tackles it quickly and effectively. Pupils know who to turn to if they are worried about anything. However, some lack confidence that staff will deal with their concerns.

The trust has helped the school to raise its expectations of pupils' achievement. This includes for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, in many subjects, improvements to the curriculum have not been implemented as well as the trust intends. Many pupils still do not benefit from these improvements. They do not achieve as highly as they should.

A growing number of pupils enjoy participating in various extra-curricular clubs. For example, they look forward to local and national debating competitions. Pupils were proud to tell inspectors about the work that the LGBTQ+ group has done to celebrate diversity in the school.

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

Since the school became an academy in 2021, support from the trust has helped to bring about improvements. Leaders at all levels of the school now share trustees' vision to provide a high-quality education. The pace of much-needed improvement has increased as a result. However, the introduction of some strategies has been interrupted by changes in staff. Some of the work that the trust has started is only just beginning to have the intended positive impact.

The trust has introduced a curriculum that is ambitious for pupils, including for those with SEND. Most pupils study a suitably broad range of subjects. The proportion of pupils studying the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects is increasing. However, a small number of pupils in Year 11 still experience a slightly narrower curriculum.

Subject curriculums are well organised. They set out exactly what pupils should learn and in what order. Despite this clarity, some staff do not deliver the curriculum as effectively as they should. At times, the approaches that they choose are not well matched to the knowledge that pupils should acquire. As a result, some pupils' learning does not build securely over time.

The school has appropriate systems to identify the additional needs of pupils with SEND. Staff receive detailed information about these needs. However, some staff do

not use this information to successfully adapt the delivery of the curriculum for these pupils. This hinders their learning further.

Weaknesses in the previous curriculum had a negative impact on the published GCSE results for pupils in 2023. High rates of absence also contributed to this. Since then, the school has made strides to improve these areas. Current key stage 3 pupils are learning and progressing through the curriculum. However, many pupils in key stage 4 have large gaps in their learning. Some of the strategies that staff use to address these gaps are not as effective as they should be.

Recently, the school has renewed its focus on attendance. Staff work closely with families to understand the causes of absences. Comprehensive support helps pupils to attend school more regularly. Some pupils' rates of attendance are beginning to improve. However, too many pupils remain persistently absent. This includes a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Consequently, these pupils remain less likely to achieve all that they should.

The school identifies pupils who struggle with reading. These pupils receive skilful support that helps them to catch up with their peers. The school's strong emphasis on reading encourages pupils to read more often than in the past.

Pupils access a well-considered careers programme. This includes a widening range of opportunities to engage with the world of work.

The school has raised its expectations of pupils' conduct. A small number of parents and carers are unhappy about these changes. The school has listened to their views. Most pupils behave well during lessons. A comprehensive programme of personal development helps pupils to learn about tolerance and respect for people who are different to themselves. Despite this, a minority of pupils still find it difficult to behave respectfully towards others. At times, this results in racist and misogynistic insults. The school is taking action to address these issues.

Staff feel well supported. They appreciate how leaders consider their workload, for example by streamlining approaches to marking pupils' work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A minority of pupils experience discriminatory language from their peers. Some do not report these issues because they do not have full confidence that staff will deal with them. The school should implement effective strategies to identify and address unacceptable behaviour so that pupils gain confidence that their concerns will be taken seriously.

- In some subjects, staff have not had sufficient support to select appropriate subject-specific pedagogies and to deliver curriculums as intended. Added to this, they do not use information about pupils with SEND effectively in order to help them to access some aspects of the curriculum. This hinders some pupils, including those with SEND, from learning the curriculum as well as they should. The school should ensure that staff receive appropriate guidance and support so that they deliver the curriculum consistently well.
- The progress that older pupils make through the curriculum is hindered by the weaker curriculum that they experienced in the past. Many pupils have large gaps in their learning as a result. This means that their attainment by the end of Year 11 is uneven. The school should ensure that staff use effective strategies to identify and address missed learning so that these pupils achieve all that they should.
- Some pupils do not attend school as often as they should, and too many pupils are persistently absent. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and for those with SEND. As a result, these pupils miss out on important learning and wider experiences that the school provides. The school should bolster its efforts to engage positively with pupils and their families so that levels of absence reduce.
- At times, the school's systems for assuring the quality of education are not used well enough to provide a clear view of how well pupils are learning. This makes it difficult for the school to check that its intent is being fully realised. The school should ensure that improvement strategies are monitored and evaluated carefully to ensure that they have the intended positive impact on pupils' achievement.

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 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	148655
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10321474
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	874
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mike Blackburn
CEO	Luke Sparkes
Principal	Chris Wilson
Website	www.dixonsfa.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Dixons Fazakerley Academy converted to become an academy in September 2021. When its predecessor school, Fazakerley High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be inadequate overall.
- This school is part of Dixons Academies Trust.
- The principal was appointed in 2021. Since then, a large number of new staff have also been appointed.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious allegation of a child protection nature was being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the allegation were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.
- The school makes use of five 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 leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector met with members of the board of trustees, including the chair of trustees. He also met with the CEO of the trust.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these subjects: English, science, mathematics, history, music and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school and their views of 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.
- 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 for staff.

Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Barbara Dutton	Ofsted Inspector

David Woodhouse	Ofsted Inspector
Scott Maclean	Ofsted Inspector
Amanda Downing	His Majesty's Inspector

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