Inspection of a good school: Ashton-on-Mersey School

Cecil Avenue, Sale, Cheshire M33 5BP

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 April 2024

Outcome

Ashton-on-Mersey School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Lee McConaghie. The school is part of The Dean Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Tarun Kapur, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Damian McGann.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, usually achieve well at Ashton-on-Mersey School. They are supported to learn deeply across a broad range of subjects. They learn with increasing confidence because staff are ambitious about what they can accomplish.

Staff expect and support pupils to behave well. Staff purposefully show pupils how to treat others with respect. They support pupils to thoughtfully reflect on their behaviour where necessary. Pupils enjoy positive relationships with staff.

Pupils benefit from well-established routines at the start, during and at the end of the school day. Pupils are usually calm and courteous. They show consideration for other pupils, staff and visitors and enjoy a highly positive culture of behaviour.

Pupils regularly learn about the world from different perspectives. They are keen to explore and understand different cultures, beliefs and points-of-view. They show a keen interest in the differences between people in their school and in the wider community.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of additional opportunities that go beyond the academic curriculum. For example, pupils enjoy taking part in sports events and performing arts. This ensures that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), regularly practise and develop their interests and talents.

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

Trustees and members of the local governing committee support the school well to ensure it is a highly positive place for staff and pupils. Staff are eager to contribute to the

school's ambitious vision for pupils' education. The school works closely with staff to support their workload and well-being. Staff feel trusted, equipped and empowered to successfully strengthen the curriculum that pupils experience and the progress that they make.

The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 11 is suitably broad and ambitious. In the sixth form, leaders are in the first year of extending the range of subjects that students can study. Many pupils and students are keen to take up a rich blend of academic and vocational opportunities. Across all subjects, it is clear what knowledge that pupils and students in the sixth form will learn. Pupils learn subject content in a carefully considered order. Most pupils and students make secure gains in what they know and remember. Consequently, they are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Staff use clear expectations and routines to promote positive behaviour when pupils are in lessons. Pupils willingly engage with learning and cooperate well with other pupils and staff.

Typically, teachers have strong subject knowledge. Mostly, they ensure that pupils and students benefit from clear explanations and well-chosen activities that allow pupils to learn subject content. In a small number of subjects, however, some teachers are still honing these practices. This means that pupils' learning is not as well matched to curriculum aims as it is elsewhere.

In many subjects, teachers confidently use assessment strategies to identify what pupils know and remember. This helps teachers to guide pupils well about gaps in their knowledge. Many pupils make good use of this information to help them progress through the curriculum. That said, across subjects, a small minority of pupils do not take full advantage of the information that teachers provide about what they know or can do. This affects how quickly some pupils make gains in their knowledge.

The school appropriately identifies gaps in pupils' reading knowledge. Pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning to read are supported effectively. Well-trained staff make use of appropriate schemes and resources to help pupils develop and practise their phonics knowledge. Subject teachers make regular use of library lessons to promote positive attitudes to reading. As a result, pupils across the school make secure gains in their reading knowledge.

The school makes skilful use of relevant information to identify pupils who may have barriers that hinder their learning or development, including those with SEND. Staff ensure that these pupils benefit from carefully delivered subject-specific support in their lessons. Consequently, pupils with SEND usually progress well through the full curriculum.

The school ensures that pupils benefit from wide-ranging opportunities to support their personal development. Staff make sure that pupils learn about personal, social, health and economic issues in a systematic manner. Pupils value and engage with opportunities to explore safety, relationships and how they can make a positive contribution to society.

Pupils benefit from a multitude of well-ordered opportunities to think about their futures. Knowledgeable staff ensure that pupils feel well supported in making decisions about their education. Furthermore, pupils gain a good understanding of the skills, experiences and qualifications that they need to pursue different careers.

Pupils are keen to attend school. The school provides strong support to help improve pupils' attendance where it is needed.

The school engages well with parents and carers. It seeks to consult with parents when needed. Staff ensure that parents are appropriately involved in supporting their children's education.

The local governing committee diligently explores accurate information about the quality and impact of pupils' experiences at the school. They ensure the school's vision is ambitious and hold the school to account about whether this is being realised. In doing so, they provide productive challenge and support that has a positive impact.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, staff are still refining how they explain subject matter and then check pupils' understanding in lessons. In these subjects, pupils do not progress through the curriculum as smoothly as they do elsewhere. The school should ensure that staff are confident in the pedagogical practices needed to help pupils gain and retain knowledge.
- A small minority of pupils do not take full advantage of information that teachers provide about gaps in their knowledge. These pupils miss out on helpful practise of recalling and applying the knowledge they have been taught. This sometimes hinders their progress. The school should ensure that pupils engage fully with the opportunities that are provided to help them to consolidate or develop their learning further, using the knowledge that they have learned previously.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2019.

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	138123
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	10321431
Type of school	Secondary modern
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,504
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Damian McGann
CEO of the trust	Tarun Kapur
Headteacher	Lee McConaghie
Website	https://aomschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 January 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Ashton-on-Mersey School is part of The Dean Trust.
- The school makes use of one registered and one unregistered alternative provider to provide full-time education 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

- 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 met with the headteacher and senior leaders. They met with representatives of the academy trust, local governing committee and local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, computing and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- 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 spoke with leaders responsible for SEND and reading. They also looked at information about the support for pupils who have additional needs.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class and around the school site. They also scrutinised behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils from all year groups and considered the responses of the pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff and considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the comments received by Ofsted's free-text facility. Inspectors also considered the views of parents that were shared during the inspection.

Inspection team

Michael Pennington, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Fiona Burke-Jackson	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn Farrent	Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024