

# Blackpool Aspire Academy

Blackpool Old Road, Blackpool, Lancashire FY3 7LS

## Inspection dates

13–14 November 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leaders have secured significant improvements to pupils' behaviour, attendance and the effectiveness of teaching since the last inspection.
- Leaders have embedded a culture of high expectations, within which the need for pupils to develop scholarly habits is emphasised.
- Pupils' outcomes are rapidly improving overall. However, their progress in English is not good, although it is quickly improving towards becoming so.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved. This is due to strong leadership and the careful support that these pupils receive.
- Leaders have ensured that teaching is more consistently effective. Teaching is generally well matched to pupils' needs and reflects the high aspirations that staff have for pupils.
- Some teachers do not ensure that their teaching helps pupils to learn as well as possible.
- Leaders have not ensured that teachers systematically develop pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum is thoughtfully planned for all subjects. It does not systematically promote British values or pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) understanding in key stage 4.
- Leaders have further strengthened the school's safeguarding culture. The school's work with a range of external agencies to keep pupils safe is exemplary.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved considerably. They are polite, considerate and respectful towards others. They have grown in self-confidence since the last inspection.
- Pupils' attendance has improved. Rates of absence have decreased and are now close to the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent decreased dramatically during the last school year.
- Governors and trustees share leaders' sharp understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, they have not ensured that leaders have closely monitored and evaluated patterns in the very high proportion of pupils who leave the school at times other than the end of Year 11.

## Full report

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

- Improve teaching further so that the progress made by pupils continues to increase by ensuring that teachers:
  - make sure that their teaching helps pupils to make the greatest gains in their learning
  - systematically enhance pupils' literacy skills, including those related to the development of writing across the curriculum.
- Ensure that the curriculum reflects leaders' high expectations and facilitates further improvements to pupils' outcomes by:
  - making sure that the curriculum is thoughtfully planned for all subjects and that it helps pupils to gain the knowledge, skills and understanding that will enable them to be successful in key stage 4 and beyond
  - adopting a more systematic approach to the promotion of British values and pupils' SMSC understanding, particularly in key stage 4.
- Ensure that leaders and governors monitor and evaluate patterns in numbers of pupils leaving the school at times other than the end of Year 11 so that they:
  - develop a thorough understanding of the characteristics of pupils who leave the school for different reasons, including to be educated at home
  - can take actions, where appropriate, to address more effectively some of the underlying reasons for pupils leaving the school.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Leaders have made significant improvements to the school since the last inspection. Pupils' behaviour has improved greatly, as have their attendance and attitudes to learning. Pupils are also making greater progress across the curriculum as a result of better teaching. However, their outcomes are not good because they are still not making the progress of which they are capable in English and some other subjects, including history. Disadvantaged pupils are now making much more progress than in the past. However, they are still making less progress than other pupils nationally.
- Leaders are ambitious for all pupils. They are motivated by the moral imperative to improve pupils' life chances and are keen to ensure that the school creates opportunity for all. They have created a culture of exceptionally high expectations, which underpins the varied improvements that have been made. Leaders are uncompromising in their efforts to establish a scholarly culture. They have unashamedly prioritised the promotion of academic learning. The great majority of pupils have responded positively to the school's revitalised expectations. Pupils have grown in confidence and self-esteem. They value their learning and agree with the school's mantra that every lesson represents a 'golden hour'.
- Leaders have a detailed understanding of the school's context and the community it serves. They appreciate the challenges and barriers to learning faced by many pupils. The school's work to support pupils' personal development is strong. Leaders ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are supported increasingly well. As a result, most pupils receive the care and support that enables them to live up to the high academic expectations set by the school.
- The improvements that have been made to teaching have made a strong contribution to pupils' improving outcomes. Leaders have ensured that teaching is having a more consistently positive impact on pupils' learning. They have introduced established routines for teaching and learning that have ensured that teaching is purposeful, engaging and more challenging. They have ensured that teachers undertake training that is focused sharply on the need to improve teaching. Their monitoring of teaching has supported the improvements that have been made.
- Leaders have been very outward facing in ensuring that the school improves. They have targeted support where the need has been greatest. For example, teachers of English were the recipients of intensive support during the last academic year. This is because there was an alarming dip in the performance of Year 11 pupils in public examinations in 2017. Leaders enlisted the support of colleagues from within the academy trust, as well as from other schools. As a result, the teaching of English has improved considerably, and the performance of Year 11 pupils in the 2018 English examinations, although still not good, was dramatically better than the previous year.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching has contributed to the greater consistency. Despite this, there is still some variation in the effectiveness of teaching. Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of teaching has not ensured that teachers routinely and carefully consider the likely impact of their teaching on pupils' learning.

- Middle leaders are increasingly having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. They champion their curriculum areas enthusiastically and share senior leaders' passion and commitment to improve pupils' outcomes further. Subject leaders closely monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in their areas.
- The curriculum has an academic core. However, leaders have not ensured that the curriculum is well planned. In some subjects, the key stage 3 curriculum does not flow seamlessly from what pupils have learned at primary school. Furthermore, the key stage 3 curriculum does not consistently provide pupils with the broad knowledge, understanding and skills needed to support the best possible achievement at key stage 4 and beyond.
- Pupils benefit from a range of extracurricular opportunities. For example, they can join the debating club, a range of sporting clubs or the 'Pzazz' performing arts group. Pupils in Year 7 also take part in a residential trip to Wales to engage in a range of outdoor pursuits that aimed at building their resilience and team spirit.
- Pupils in key stage 3 have developed a good understanding of British values. The impact of the school's ethos on such younger pupils is strikingly consistent in this respect. In particular, pupils develop a strong understanding of the rule of law through the curriculum and the consistent application of the school's behaviour policy. They also engage in democracy by voting for members of the school council.
- Discrete lessons in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and religious education augment a range of other opportunities that enhance pupils' SMSC understanding in key stage 3. However, pupils do not benefit from a similarly systematic approach in key stage 4. Pupils are not taught discrete PSHE lessons in key stage 4. Furthermore, a large proportion of the time that used to be dedicated to form time is now used for additional academic learning. As a result, the promotion of pupils' SMSC is primarily through the subjects that they study, assemblies and 'aspiration days' that take place five times a year. Pupils throughout the school are tolerant and respectful, and they understand the importance of equality. However, pupils in key stage 3 have a more vivid understanding of British values and SMSC because of the rich, varied and regular opportunities from which they benefit.
- Leaders have used the additional funds provided by the pupil premium discerningly. As a result, the use of this funding has made a marked contribution to the significant improvements that have been made to the behaviour, attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- The special educational needs coordinator is new to her role and has built on the previous strong practice in the school. She closely monitors the progress being made by pupils with SEND. She evaluates the impact of individual support that has been put in place to help different pupils. She deploys a skilled group of teaching assistants effectively in order to ensure that pupils' needs are met routinely. As a result of the improvements that have been made in this area since the last inspection, the achievement of pupils with SEND has been transformed.
- Leaders' work has improved the school's reputation within the local area. The number of families applying to the school as their first preference has more than doubled over the last few years. Parents and carers are increasingly positive about the school and grateful for the impact that the school has had on their children.

- Members of staff greatly enjoy working at the school. They feel proud to be part of a school that they feel is rapidly improving. They are also very appreciative of the consideration that leaders give to their workload and well-being.

### **Governance of the school**

- Academy council members and trustees share leaders' passion for improving the school. Collectively, they bring considerable knowledge, skills and experience to their roles. They challenge and support leaders effectively and hold them to account for their actions in developing the school.
- Those responsible for governance have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have helped leaders to develop a sound rationale for the strategies that they have employed to improve the school during the different stages of its development. For example, they have supported leaders' pragmatic approach to refining the curriculum during a time of instability. This is to ensure that adequate time has been given to filling gaps in pupils' knowledge that were caused by historic weaknesses in teaching.
- Those responsible for governance have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They undertake different activities that enable them to test out the validity of the information that leaders provide for them.
- Governors have not ensured that leaders pay close attention to any potential patterns associated with the very high number of pupils who leave the school at times other than the end of Year 11. As a result, they are unaware of any common characteristics that are shared by groups of pupils who leave for particular reasons, such as to be educated at home. In turn, this has prevented leaders from taking any actions that may be appropriate to address some of the underlying reasons for pupils leaving the school.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have built on the pre-existing strengths in safeguarding to establish a strong safeguarding culture. They have ensured that all staff take their responsibilities seriously. They understand the risks that are potentially more prevalent in the local community, such as those relating to substance misuse, criminality and domestic violence. Staff are alert to signs of abuse or neglect and diligently pass their concerns to the leaders of safeguarding.
- The school's safeguarding team adopts a careful and considered approach to ensuring the safety of individual pupils and groups. Its work with an extensive range of external agencies, such as the police and child and adolescent mental health services, is exemplary.
- Pupils are supported effectively in developing a clear understanding of different risks. The school's work to promote safe use of the internet is particularly effective, as is its work with the police to ensure that pupils understand the risks associated with different criminal behaviours.
- Leaders fundamentally understand the safeguarding implications of high rates of pupils'

absence. The improvements that they have made to pupils' attendance have therefore significantly reduced the risks associated with regular absence, such as neglect and exploitation.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. It is now enabling all groups of pupils to make considerably better progress.
- Leaders have ensured that most teaching shares common characteristics. For example, most lessons begin with an engaging activity that leads to teachers posing a 'golden question' for pupils to explore. The consistency of this approach has reduced the variability in the quality of teaching. Despite this, some inconsistencies remain in the effectiveness of teaching, which are reflected in the unevenness of pupils' outcomes across the curriculum.
- Teachers now share very high expectations of pupils' behaviour and academic achievement. This has resulted in much better behaviour and attitudes to learning. Little time is wasted in lessons and pupils apply themselves very well to their work.
- Teaching is strongest in science and creative subjects. Teachers in science have exceptionally high expectations of all pupils' learning. They introduce new scientific content in a systematic way and regularly build on prior learning. This ensures that pupils develop a deep and precise knowledge and understanding of the topics that they study.
- In creative subjects, such as art, pupils become immersed in their learning and enjoy living up to the high expectations set by teachers.
- Teachers use assessment effectively. Regular assessments help teachers and pupils to ascertain precisely what pupils can and cannot do. This information is used by teachers to set pupils work that addresses gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Teachers give pupils the time and support to reflect on their work and make improvements. This ensures that future learning is generally built on firm foundations.
- Teachers often question pupils effectively. They attach great significance to the importance of pupils' factual recall. As a result, they employ a range of strategies to ensure that pupils' knowledge is secure. However, some questioning is less effective at developing pupils' thinking and encouraging them to apply their knowledge and understanding.
- The teaching of English has greatly improved. Teachers of this subject are skilled at providing pupils of different abilities with work that is both challenging and accessible. They provide pupils with strong support to develop the content, fluency and sophistication of their writing. They also help pupils to develop technical accuracy in their writing, including their spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Despite this, teaching across the curriculum does not do enough to support the development of pupils' literacy skills, particularly in relation to writing. As a result, pupils' attainment has been inhibited in subjects that rely heavily on their ability to write with fluency and technical competence, such as English and history.
- In a small number of cases, teachers do not think carefully enough about the impact of

their teaching on pupils' learning. This is because they have focused on applying the school's model for designing lessons at the expense of more careful thinking about how pupils' learning could be maximised. For example, some teachers expect pupils to be able to answer broad and ambitious 'golden questions' without ensuring that pupils already know enough to give detailed and thoughtful answers. When this is the case, pupils are left with a very sketchy understanding of the materials being taught.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have been helped to develop many of the characteristics of effective learners. For example, they complete 'prep' tasks each evening to reinforce their knowledge and understanding of what they are learning in different subjects. Such activities are helping pupils to develop the scholarly habits promoted by leaders.
- Pupils, particularly lower down the school, value the improvements that have been made. Their conduct reflects the growth in their confidence and self-esteem. They now expect to be successful.
- Pupils are helped to develop an age-appropriate understanding of different risks. For example, they have learned about the dangers associated with fireworks, roads, drugs and alcohol, and criminal activity.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different forms of bullying, such as cyberbullying and bullying based on prejudice and discrimination. They say that bullying has become very rare and that teachers deal with it effectively.
- The school's work to promote equality is effective. Pupils value the school's insistence that 'everyone is different but equal'. A group of pupils effectively raise pupils' awareness of a range of issues related to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.
- Pupils are well supported in maintaining their physical and mental health.
- Children who are looked after are supported effectively by the school. The headteacher of the virtual school, who is responsible for the education of children who are looked after in Blackpool, praised the school for the lengths that staff go to in order to ensure that these children achieve well and are happy and settled.
- Leaders attach great significance to providing pupils with the opportunity to be leaders. For example, inspectors observed senior prefects leading an assembly on bullying.
- Pupils benefit from careers education and guidance that enable them to make appropriate choices regarding the next stage in their education. This work has played a key role in the dramatic reduction in the number of pupils who do not have an appropriate place at a college, training provider or job when they leave the school.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils who have access to alternative provision are closely monitored and supported. Leaders ensure that arrangements to support their behaviour and personal development are effective.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils conduct themselves very well around the school site. They are polite, considerate towards others and respond attentively to instructions from staff.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. This ensures that lessons are purposeful and characterised by cooperative behaviour. When teaching is enthusiastic and well matched to pupils' needs, they demonstrate exemplary attitudes to learning.
- Until very recently, rates of permanent exclusion were very high. This is because some pupils have struggled to conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with leaders' expectations. Leaders have applied their behaviour policy stringently as part of their 'no-nonsense' approach to improving pupils' behaviour.
- Leaders can demonstrate that pupils who have been permanently excluded received comprehensive support from a range of sources prior to leaving the school. Leaders' actions have had a pronounced effect on improving the behaviour of many pupils who have regularly behaved badly in the past.
- Rates of exclusion, both permanent and fixed-term, are slowing significantly. This is because the majority of pupils are keen to conform to the school's high expectations, and because leaders have fine-tuned the support that they offer those who behave badly.
- During the inspection, a number of older pupils expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour. However, these concerns were not corroborated by other evidence gathered by inspectors.
- Pupils' attendance has improved each year since the previous inspection. During the 2017-18 school year, pupils' attendance improved dramatically. The proportion of pupils with long periods of poor attendance also dropped dramatically over the same period. The proportion of pupils who are classed as being persistently absent is now broadly in line with historic national averages, although rates of overall absence remain a little above the national figure.
- Leaders have reduced absence through the relentless promotion of the virtues of regular attendance. Pupils receive rewards for good attendance. Families also receive careful help to improve in this regard. However, leaders are uncompromising when parents fail to ensure that their children attend regularly and have taken legal action against a large number of such parents.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- The improved performance of Year 11 pupils in external examinations since the previous inspection indicates that pupils leaving the school have made greater progress across the curriculum during their time at the school. This also indicates that the rate of improvement is quickening and that outcomes are rapidly improving towards being good. Despite this, outcomes still require improvement because pupils who have left the school recently have made less progress in English than other pupils nationally. The attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils, although improving rapidly, still lag behind that of other pupils nationally, as does the progress of the most able pupils.

There is also too much variation in pupils' achievement across the curriculum.

- Pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11 in 2017 had made inadequate progress in English. This represented a significant decline in comparison with the outcomes of the previous year. This drop contrasted markedly with the improvements seen in other curriculum areas. Leaders therefore provided the team of English teachers with intensive support that facilitated considerable improvements to the quality of teaching.
- The performance of Year 11 pupils in 2018 indicated that they had made far greater progress than their predecessors. Provisional information indicates that the progress made by this group was over half a GCSE grade higher than that of the previous cohort. Despite this, pupils' progress was still below the national average. This is due to the legacy of weak teaching, including a lack of focus on the development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Pupils make consistently excellent progress in science because of effective teaching. Their attainment and progress in science compare very favourably with national averages. Their attainment and progress in mathematics are improving incrementally each year and are getting closer to national averages. This reflects leaders' efforts to ensure that teaching in this area continues to improve.
- Pupils also attain well in a range of BTEC First Awards, such as business and enterprise, sport, music and performing arts. This reflects the strength of teaching in these areas.
- Despite this, there remains too much variation in pupils' outcomes across the curriculum. Pupils make weak progress in history compared with other areas. This is due to weaknesses in teaching and a key stage 3 curriculum that does not provide pupils with the breadth of knowledge and understanding needed to learn well at GCSE. The performance of Year 11 pupils in computer science also indicates that they have not learned well in this area. In some subjects, such as geography, there is significant variation in the outcomes achieved by different classes. This reflects the variation that remains in the quality of teaching.
- Pupils with low and middle prior attainment have made considerably stronger progress over the last two years. As a result, the progress made by these pupils by the time they leave the school is broadly in line with national averages. In contrast, the progress of the most able pupils has not improved to quite the same extent. Despite this, many of the most able pupils attain well and make good progress. In 2018, a number of pupils attained the highest GCSE grades in biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, English literature, religious studies and geography.
- Disadvantaged pupils are also making far greater gains in their learning than has been the case in the past. Their performance in public examinations at the end of Year 11 indicates that their progress is moving towards that of other pupils nationally, even though a significant difference remains.
- The progress and attainment of pupils with SEND has been transformed due to highly effective leadership and sustained improvements to teaching. In 2017, the performance of Year 11 pupils in public examinations indicated that they had made very poor progress during their time at the school. In contrast, pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11 in 2018 had made progress across the curriculum that was much stronger.

- Leaders' information, supported by a detailed scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that pupils' outcomes are continuing to improve. Pupils currently in Year 11 have made greater progress than their predecessors by the same point in time. Furthermore, pupils in all other year groups are also making stronger progress in most subjects, including English.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a considerable reduction in the proportion of pupils leaving the school without an appropriate destination. This is a result of improved careers education and advice, enhanced personal development and pupils achieving better qualifications during their time at the school. It is now exceptionally rare for a pupil not to be in education, employment or further training after leaving the school.

## School details

Unique reference number	141132
Local authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	10056523

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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	689
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jill Gray
Principal	Lisa Shuttleworth-Brown
Telephone number	01253 353155
Website	<a href="http://www.blackpoolaspireacademy.co.uk">www.blackpoolaspireacademy.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@aspire.fcat.org.uk">admin@aspire.fcat.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	13–14 December 2016

## Information about this school

- Bispham High School and Collegiate High School merged to become Blackpool Aspire Academy on 1 September 2014. The school moved to a new building in November 2015.
- The school is part of the Fylde Coast Academy Trust (FCAT). The appropriate authority for the school is the board of trustees. Trustees entrust the academy council with the responsibility of directly overseeing the school's work. The chair of the academy council is also a trustee.
- A small number of pupils attend education off site at Educational Diversity and The Alternative School.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is very high. The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average.
- A large number of pupils join and leave the school at times other than the end of a

school year.

- The principal has been in post since September 2016.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning alongside school leaders. They observed pupils' behaviour during playtime, lunchtime and at the start and end of the school day.
- Pupils' work across a range of subjects was scrutinised.
- Meetings were held with leaders, governors, the executive principal, the chief executive officer for FCAT, members of the academy council and trustees. Inspectors also spoke with leaders from the virtual school at Blackpool and Educational Diversity, which is the local pupil-referral unit. An inspector also spoke with the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors formally met with groups of pupils from each year group. They also talked informally with pupils about the school. They heard pupils read.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's plans for improvement, self-evaluation and information about pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors looked at safeguarding information and documents relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors considered 12 responses to the online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, and took account of seven comments made by parents via Ofsted's free-text service. They also considered 50 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire and 22 responses to the pupils' questionnaire. They also considered evidence forwarded by the school on the views of parents and pupils.
- Inspectors looked at information on the school's website.

## Inspection team

Will Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Claire Hollister	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Haddock	Ofsted Inspector

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