

Great Academy Ashton

Broadoak Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire OL6 8RF

Inspection dates

25–26 June 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is improving year on year, but is still below that seen nationally, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, boys and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- In the past, the curriculum has not served pupils well. Until now, it has limited how well they are prepared for their next steps in education, employment and training.
- Behaviour is rapidly improving towards good. The majority of pupils behave well around the school and in lessons, but the number of exclusions remains above the national average, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- Attendance rates are rising towards the national average. However, the absence rate of disadvantaged pupils remains high.
- Pupil premium funding is targeted appropriately. However, analysis of the spending does not clearly identify those strategies that are most successful.
- Strategies to improve pupils' vocabulary and spelling are not embedded sufficiently. Pupils' writing skills are not consistently well developed over time in some subjects.
- Homework is not effective in building on pupils' prior knowledge. It does not prepare them well for future learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The strong leadership and measured actions of the headteacher have improved the school significantly in all areas since the previous inspection.
- Teaching and learning are good. Pupils now benefit from strong teaching across a wide range of subjects and year groups. As a result, pupils currently on roll make much stronger progress than in the past.
- Leaders create a positive, welcoming culture where all pupils are welcomed and encouraged to do their best.
- The school is highly inclusive. Vulnerable pupils are well looked after and leaders ensure that their needs are met so that they can reach their full potential.
- Governance is strong. Governors have an accurate view of the strengths of the school. They hold leaders firmly to account and place the best interests of pupils at the centre of all they do.
- Pupils feel safe in school. Parents, carers and staff agree. The strong programme of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) education contributes to this.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the effectiveness of leadership and management, by ensuring that:
 - the effective work of middle leaders on reviewing the curriculum is implemented fully so that pupils develop the subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding necessary for success
 - the use and impact of the pupil premium funding are reviewed thoroughly to identify the most successful strategies.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning, by:
 - teachers focusing on improving pupils' vocabulary and literacy skills and increasing their opportunities for extended writing across the curriculum
 - improving the quality of homework so that it builds on pupils' knowledge effectively and prepares them well for the next stages in their learning.
- Ensure that behaviour continues to improve so that:
 - fixed-term and permanent exclusions continue to decrease, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
 - pupils remain on task and low-level disruption decreases further so that pupils engage fully in their learning
 - pupils effectively regulate their behaviour and develop the resilience and character necessary to become self-motivated learners.
- Further improve the attendance of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.
- Continue to improve the outcomes of pupils, especially those with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and boys.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by the multi-academy trust and the interim executive board, has transformed this school. The headteacher has created a culture of trust from a school in chaos at the time of the previous inspection. The school is now a place of learning where pupils feel valued and part of a community.
- Leadership at all levels is now a strength of the school. Leaders, members of the trust and the interim executive board have worked closely together, making difficult decisions where necessary, to ensure that staff at all levels are committed and able to bring about demonstrable and sustainable improvements. The newly formed senior leadership team is now a group of talented, committed and caring leaders, able to implement and embed positive change across the school.
- All staff share the headteacher's vision of achieving excellence to improve the life chances of children in this community. They are clear about the role they play in providing a fast-improving standard of education for pupils.
- Leaders and the trust improvement team are unwavering in their focus on consistently improving the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils will want to learn, attend more regularly and improve their outcomes. Teachers are trusted to take risks in their teaching and share good practice within the school. The relationships between staff are supportive and reflective. Staff are challenged and supported in improving and responding positively to the transparent and clear lines of accountability now present.
- Leaders are accurate in their self-evaluation. They are aware of the strengths of the school and its effectiveness at all stages on their journey out of special measures. Plans for improvement are focused on the main priorities. Clear strategies are outlined so that successes can be measured and evaluated effectively.
- Considerable high-quality support has been provided by the trust to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. It has provided training and professional development to support staff. Leadership, coaching and support have been particularly effective as senior and middle leaders now take the lead in continuing to improve the school. Leaders are now no longer reliant on support from the trust. The school is well on its way to being a self-improving, reflective body of professionals working effectively together.
- Leaders' actions have secured substantial improvements in all areas. Vulnerable pupils at this school are well supported, academically, socially and emotionally. All pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online and in the wider community. The guidance and support provided for pupils, particularly for their emotional health and well-being, are of the highest quality. Leadership of inclusion is exemplary.
- The care for children looked after is a notable strength. Leaders ensure that these pupils progress well academically and pastorally. The local authority and the headteacher of the virtual school work closely with leaders. They have every confidence in leaders and staff to ensure that pupils, often with complex emotional needs, are able to thrive at this school. Leaders work effectively with the local authority

to make sure that these pupils receive the support they need to help them to settle at the school and begin to thrive.

- Senior leaders have redesigned the curriculum. A broad range of qualifications is now on offer at key stage 4 to enable pupils to study languages, separate sciences and creative subjects and to follow vocational courses. An increasing proportion of pupils now study the suite of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate, particularly as more pupils are opting to study, and are successful in, modern foreign languages.
- The curriculum now better meets the needs of pupils and the business needs of the local community. Staff focus pupils on the purpose of learning by encouraging them to appreciate the links between 'enterprise, professionalism and employment' and their learning. This supports the high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance pupils receive. As a result of these aspects of provision, an increasing proportion of pupils are going on to appropriate destinations after Year 11.
- Middle leaders are redesigning the curriculum in their subject areas to ensure that it is well sequenced and supports pupils' development of knowledge, skills and understanding. However, curriculum and assessment reviews are not yet embedded and are a work in progress this academic year. The curriculum improvements in subjects such as history are key to the improved progress and success of current pupils.
- The SMSC development of pupils is a strength. Leaders have developed a well-structured programme which effectively raises pupils' awareness of a range of views, cultures and social issues. Pupils are growing in their respect for others, regardless of differences. They have many opportunities to support others and the local community through groups and fund-raising activities. As a result, they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Links with primary schools are strong. Leaders and staff get to know pupils early. Pupils in need of extra support are identified and a transition programme is put in place to bridge the gap between primary school and secondary school. As a result, transition for all pupils, particularly vulnerable pupils, is as smooth as possible.
- The leadership of SEND is improving in its effectiveness. While historical outcomes for this group of pupils are weak, they are improving considerably for current pupils. Pupils with SEND are identified early and accurately. Appropriately targeted support helps pupils to learn and develop effectively. Bespoke training for staff and improved communication about pupils' needs and progress ensure that strategies are used effectively to support pupils in making strong progress from their individual starting points.
- Leaders ensure that the pupil premium funding is used to improve the attendance, behaviour and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. However, while improvements can be seen in the outcomes and behaviour of current disadvantaged pupils, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are excluded remains too high.
- The attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains a cause for concern, although the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school has fallen considerably. Leaders know that improvements in this area remain fragile. Governors recognise that the in-depth review and analysis of the impact of these improvement strategies are key to strengthening this area. A review of the pupil premium funding

has not been recommended as the trust and the interim executive board have the knowledge and expertise to undertake this activity.

- Overall, morale at the school is high. Staff enjoy working at the school and feel supported by leaders in all aspects of their work. Pupils feel positive about the improvements in all areas of school life. They feel included, listened to and 'championed'. Parents are increasingly supportive of the school and now believe that their children are well taught, that behaviour is improving beyond recognition and that the school is well led and managed.

Governance of the school

- Governance of the school, through the interim executive board and the trustees, is highly effective. The scheme of delegation shows clear delineation of responsibilities between the trust and the board.
- The chief executive officer of the trust has been instrumental in securing high-quality support for the school. She has ensured that key appointments have been made at appropriate times and both challenges and supports the principal and senior leadership team.
- Members of the interim executive board are knowledgeable and highly skilled and know the school extremely well. As a result, they hold leaders firmly to account in ensuring that all areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection are rapidly improving. They are accurate in their assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- Board members and trustees are confident in the ability of the principal to continue to improve the school. They recognise that the changes that she has brought about since her appointment have improved the school significantly and have created a truly inclusive learning environment where pupils are valued and cared for.
- The trustees and governors have been instrumental in supporting the headteacher in bringing this school out of special measures.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding which runs throughout the school. Leaders and staff are aware of the role they play in ensuring that pupils are safe. Staff undertake regular training which enables them to identify any pupils in need of help and support. They know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil.
- Leaders ensure that pupils and their families receive appropriate help and support as swiftly as possible. Referrals to other agencies are timely and followed up tenaciously. Leaders do not rest until pupils receive the help and support they need.
- All safeguarding records, documentation and procedures are compliant and fit for purpose. Leaders carry out the necessary pre-employment checks and statutory requirements are met.

- Pupils feel safe in school. They are taught how to keep themselves safe, both online and in the community. Leaders ensure that pupils are aware of any safeguarding risks in the local area and are influential in helping them stay safe once they leave the school site. The local authority recognises the stellar work undertaken by leaders in this respect and have no concerns about placing the most vulnerable pupils at Great Academy Ashton, as they have the utmost confidence they will be well supported there by highly trained, caring staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching and learning is good in a wide range of subjects, for example, in English, history and art. The majority of teaching over time is effective in developing the subject knowledge, skills and understanding of pupils. Work in pupils' books shows a high level of challenge to which most pupils respond well.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and is used effectively to explain new and more complex concepts to pupils. Routines in lessons are well established and pupils benefit from a consistent approach to learning, such as the 'strong starts' and 'strong finishes' which are now embedded across the school.
- Teachers' questioning of pupils typically develops their thinking well. On occasion, when questioning is weaker, pupils can more easily opt out of thinking for themselves and rely on others in the group to think deeply.
- When teaching is well matched to the needs of pupils and expectations for positive attitudes to learning are high, current pupils make good progress over time. However, when teachers plan work that does not adequately meet the needs of pupils, a small minority can become disengaged from their learning and display an apathetic attitude towards their work or become distracted from it. Evidence seen in pupils' books shows that there are some variations in pupils' experiences due to remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning or the over-reliance on non-permanent teachers.
- There is a school-wide focus on developing pupils' vocabulary, spelling and grammar. Teachers identify and correct key words to help pupils to improve their literacy and writing skills. When this strategy is used effectively, pupils' extended writing improves. This approach is not consistently embedded across subjects, and as a result, some lower-ability pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to build up their writing skills in some subjects.
- Teachers are increasingly skilled at identifying the progress pupils are making through robust and accurate assessment systems. As a result of being able to identify more accurately gaps in pupils' learning, any underachievement of pupils is swiftly addressed and appropriate interventions put into place.
- Pupils with SEND are well supported in their learning. Foundation learning classes provide focused teaching that is well matched to the needs of pupils. Support from additional adults is effective and current pupils with SEND are making stronger progress from their individual starting points than has been the case historically.
- Leaders have clear and specific plans to improve the quality and effectiveness of homework across the school. When homework is well planned and builds effectively on

learning, pupils value it and complete it accordingly. However, homework is not used consistently across the school to build effectively on pupils' learning.

- Pupils and staff talk positively about the considerable and sustained improvements in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive and respectful. The vast majority of pupils respond well to the better teaching across the school and make good progress as a result.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The ethos of the school is centred on what is best for each individual pupil. Inclusivity is at the heart of the work of all leaders and staff. The well-being of pupils is paramount. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils are safe and happy and feel a sense of belonging to the school. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and that they now feel a strong sense of community.
- High expectations of care and welfare, coupled with an unrelenting focus on making sure pupils' experiences are positive, run through the school. Pupils are well mannered and friendly. The vast majority of pupils are respectful to staff and their peers. Pupils enjoy school and tell inspectors how the positive changes since the previous inspection are 'unbelievable'.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities for pupils that broaden their experiences and enable them to learn new skills or develop their talents further. Pupils are now offered trips to local universities, local places of interest and places further abroad such as to Iceland and Ecuador.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills. Pupils are encouraged to undertake responsibilities to prepare them for life after school. Pupils speak positively about the many student leadership roles they can take on, for example through becoming peer mediators, student council representatives, sports captains and 'upstanders', where pupils reinforce the school's work on anti-bullying practices. Pupils are particularly proud of the work they do to protect other young people and advise them of the risks of social media through the 'Safe Social Network Activity Practice' group. Members of this team work with pupils in Great Academy and other schools locally to educate pupils about online safety.
- Leaders work closely with external agencies to raise pupils' awareness of issues such as mental well-being and physical health. Through assemblies, form time and the personal development curriculum, pupils are taught about issues such as knife crime, gang culture and how to help keep themselves safe in the community.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.

- Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. There is now a calm and orderly environment around the school. Discriminatory behaviour and inappropriate language are not tolerated and are addressed swiftly. These are now no longer commonplace. The school's ethos is welcoming and congenial.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are now thriving. The vast majority of pupils know that staff want the best for them and are there to support them. Despite this, some pupils struggle to regulate their behaviour and low-level disruption or other negative behaviour occurs at times.
- Leaders have taken effective action to improve behaviour across the school by improving the quality of teaching, supporting well any pupils with complex needs and developing strong relationships with pupils and their families. Staff use a range of strategies to deal with incidents of poor behaviour by allowing pupils opportunities to 'put it right' and through appropriate use of the 'turn-around room' where pupils are given the space to reflect on their behaviour and then reintegrate into learning.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are falling, as are the numbers of fixed-term and permanent exclusions. However, they remain above national averages. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are excluded has increased this academic year.
- The importance of good attendance has a high profile across the school. As a result, pupils' rates of attendance are gradually improving towards the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains stubbornly low. However, a proportion of these pupils are vulnerable with varied and complex needs. Some of these pupils are improving their attendance from very low starting points.
- The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is decreasing. However, almost a quarter of disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly. Case studies seen during the inspection show that leaders are working tirelessly to support pupils so that their rate of absence decreases.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Results in public examinations show that pupils' progress has improved year on year since the previous inspection, particularly that of girls and most-able pupils. Pupils now make stronger progress across a range of subjects, including science, modern foreign languages and mathematics. The progress and attainment of pupils who speak English as an additional language are strong.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is improving. However, in 2018, these pupils' results were still on average half a grade below those of other pupils nationally with similar starting points. In part, this is because their attendance has been well below the national average.
- Attainment is rising slowly, with higher proportions of pupils leaving the school having achieved strong passes in English and mathematics. However, in 2018, more than half of pupils left school not having achieved basic passes in English and mathematics. The legacy of a poor curriculum and weaker teaching has had a negative effect on the achievement of older pupils. As a result, although current Year 11 pupils are making

better progress compared with that of pupils in previous years, they have had considerable ground to make up.

- The progress of pupils with SEND has historically been poor. However, the progress of current pupils with SEND is improving rapidly due to stronger leadership of this area, improved support, and early and accurate identification of their needs.
- The information provided by the school and work seen in books show that current pupils are now achieving more across a range of subjects and year groups than in the past. This has been achieved by improvements in teaching and a curriculum model that better meets pupils' needs.
- The progress of key stage 3 pupils is good. Pupils are on track to meet the aspirational targets set by the school across year groups and subjects. Pupils are making strong progress in subjects such as science and geography. Any differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers are rapidly diminishing. Throughout key stage 3, girls continue to outperform boys, but improving teaching and attitudes to learning are having a positive effect on the progress of all pupils.
- Over the past three years, boys have made less progress than girls. Leaders have been quick to identify the reasons for this and strategies have rapidly been put into place to improve the progress and attainment of current boys on roll.
- Pupils in Year 7 who need to catch up benefit from targeted literacy and numeracy support. There is a strong focus on developing their speaking and writing skills, with a particular goal of widening and improving their vocabulary. While these strategies are not fully embedded, they are beginning to help pupils to express themselves confidently and clearly. The proportion of pupils who catch up in mathematics is lower than in literacy, but leaders have clear strategies in place to improve provision in this area.
- Leaders promote a culture of reading across the school. They recognise that on entry to the school, pupils start at Great Academy with reading skills below what is typical for their age. As a result, targeted strategies used in form time, coupled with focused interventions and high-quality teaching in the foundation learning classes, mean that pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to develop a love of reading.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision for part of their education generally attend and behave well. Leaders ensure that these placements are tailored to meet pupils' academic and pastoral needs. The courses they follow allow pupils who have previously disengaged from their learning to experience success. As a result of these arrangements, most go on to secure places on further training courses or employment with training.
- Pupils are increasingly well prepared for the next stage in their education, employment and training. A well-planned and purposeful careers education programme ensures that pupils receive high-quality information, advice, guidance and experiences. As a result, more pupils than ever before go on to appropriate destinations when they leave school.

School details

Unique reference number	135508
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	10092276

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,270
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Deborah Ball
Principal	Jenny Langley
Telephone number	0161 241 9555
Website	www.gaa.org.uk
Email address	admin@gaa.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 February–1 March 2017

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized school for pupils aged 11–16 years.
- Great Academy Ashton (formerly known as New Charter Academy) is part of Great Academies Educational Trust (GAET).
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend the school is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The school uses alternative provision at Greater Manchester Alternative Provision and Works 4 U to contribute to the education of a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a wide range of subjects in different year groups. Some observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of other short visits to lessons, assemblies and other activities.
- Inspectors met with pupils to listen to their views, both formally and informally.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaks, in assemblies, in lessons and at the end of the school day. They looked at pupils' work in lessons and looked at a sample of their books jointly with leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, a group of middle leaders and newly and recently qualified teachers. Inspectors met with the assistant director of education for Tameside and with the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors spoke with the chair and members of the interim executive board by telephone. They also spoke on the telephone with the headteacher of the virtual school and with the school's alternative providers.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation that covered: information about pupils' attainment and progress; the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan; minutes of meetings of the interim executive board; and records relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour, destinations and safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed by parents in the 57 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. They also spoke with some parents by telephone.

Inspection team

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