

Darwen Vale High School

Blackburn Road, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 0AL

Inspection dates

15–16 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Unstable, ineffective leadership over a period of time resulted in poor-quality teaching, an inappropriate curriculum and pupils' poor behaviour for learning.
- In 2016 and 2017, outcomes showed that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, made inadequate progress in many subjects including mathematics. However, the new principal has taken swift action to strengthen senior leadership and to begin to resolve legacy issues.
- The inherited plan to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils was ineffective. Leaders are taking other actions, but it is too early to see the effect of these changes on pupils' progress.
- Pupils' attendance and punctuality are not as good as they should be, especially that of disadvantaged pupils.
- Subject leaders are not fully effective in improving the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment and raising pupils' achievement.
- Teachers have not had sufficient time to use the new assessment system to inform their teaching and accelerate pupils' learning.
- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve are not high enough. This can lead to low-level disruption in lessons.
- Teachers do not routinely stretch and challenge pupils, including through effective questioning, to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Pupils are not always encouraged to respond to the advice teachers give them about how they can improve their work.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of education provided and improvement plans are accurately focused on the right priorities.
- The principal and senior leadership team lead with drive and determination. They are having a positive effect on the quality of provision. Current pupils are making better progress because the quality of teaching is improving.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are given high priority. Strategies to develop pupils' self-confidence and to strengthen pupils' resilience are proving to be effective.
- The multi-academy trust and the local governing committee provide robust challenge and effective support to leaders.
- The vast majority of pupils and parents are positive about recent changes. They report that higher expectations are having a positive impact on behaviour.
- The curriculum provides ample opportunities for pupils to succeed academically and personally.
- There is a wide range of opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is strong.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in order to accelerate progress and raise standards for pupils in all subjects, but particularly in mathematics, by:
 - using accurate assessment information to plan suitably challenging work for all pupils, but particularly for disadvantaged pupils and the most able
 - planning learning opportunities that require pupils to think for themselves, solve problems and take risks so that they develop increased confidence in their learning
 - providing opportunities for pupils to develop and apply literacy and numeracy skills across all areas of the curriculum
 - ensuring greater consistency in the implementation of the school's marking and feedback policy
 - ensuring that all teachers use effective questioning to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding and develop their thinking skills.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan activities which capture pupils' interests so that all pupils are fully engaged in their learning
 - raising attendance overall and for groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, so that it is in line with, or better than, the national average.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - implementing the findings of the pupil premium review to ensure that additional funding is used effectively to enable disadvantaged pupils to reach their potential
 - ensuring that all subject leaders are effective in improving the quality of teaching and raising achievement in their subjects and areas of responsibility
 - monitoring and evaluating critically the impact of actions taken, including the new curriculum, against clear, specific and measurable pupil progress targets.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders, governors and the trust are taking appropriate action to change the direction of this school. They have an accurate understanding of the quality of education that the school currently provides. Leaders' approach to self-evaluation is robust and improvement plans are appropriately targeted at areas in need of improvement.
- The new principal, appointed in June 2017, is well supported by an executive principal and other trust professionals, and leads with drive and determination. Everyone associated with the school is intent on raising aspirations and outcomes for Darwen Vale pupils. Aply supported by the recently formed senior leadership team, the principal is working hard to raise standards. As a result, current pupils' progress is beginning to improve. Leaders are taking the necessary steps to eradicate weak teaching. They have already overhauled an ineffective curriculum and made good progress in addressing poor behaviour.
- Leaders, including governors, are working hard to foster pupils' higher aspirations. The vast majority of pupils behave well in lessons and in social areas and are keen to achieve.
- Leaders and governors are taking successful action to secure good teaching through support and training. Teaching has been particularly weak in mathematics and this, alongside weak leadership, led to very poor outcomes for all groups of pupils. A recently appointed assistant principal is providing strong leadership in mathematics. There is evidence that teaching is improving in mathematics and that this is leading to better outcomes for pupils.
- Prior to the newly formed leadership taking over the school, teachers did not have access to a full range of teaching, learning and assessment policies. Leaders have worked with teachers to produce a new suite of effective policies, including 10 classroom 'non-negotiables' and the teaching and learning handbook. The implementation of these is leading to improvement in the consistency and quality of teaching.
- Staff morale is high. Staff feel well supported by leaders. Staff appreciate the training opportunities that leaders have already provided. Teachers are keen to continue improving the quality of teaching and learning and say that they have benefited from the training that has already taken place.
- There are many opportunities for staff to collaborate within school, across the trust, and more widely to improve the quality of education. Key leaders and teachers from the other successful schools in the trust have provided support to further school improvement, including in the mathematics department.
- Leaders use the additional funding appropriately to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Until recently, information has not been used effectively to check on the progress that these pupils have made and their inconsistent progress has gone unchecked. This is no longer the case.
- In the past, leaders have not fully evaluated the impact of the use of the literacy and numeracy catch-up funding. Leaders now monitor and track pupils who are eligible for additional support and have recently implemented systems to assess the

effectiveness of their actions to raise pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Current pupils in Years 7 and 8 who need additional support are beginning to catch up with their peers.

- Leaders have developed and are using more robust quality assurance systems to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. These systems are having the desired effect in improving pupils' learning and achievement across their subjects.
- Leaders' arrangements for assessing teachers' performance are secure. Teachers and other staff know the high expectations that leaders have of them.
- Leaders, governors and the trust have taken action to ensure that pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. They recognised that the previous curriculum did not support either good teaching and learning or good outcomes for pupils. Leaders have made the necessary changes to ensure that they plan the curriculum effectively to meet pupils' needs.
- Pupils appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sports and the performing arts, which have a positive effect on their wider development.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted. The opportunities to promote this, along with a highly effective personal, social, health and ethics programme, mean that pupils have many opportunities to grow and flourish and to develop as well-rounded young people. Leaders' work in this area prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders ensure that pupils learn about British values. Pupils appreciate and benefit from taking on a wide range of leadership roles.
- Until recently, subject leaders have not been fully accountable for the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment in their subject areas. This has changed, with higher expectations of subject leaders linked to pupils' outcomes.
- The new principal wasted no time in commissioning a review into how the pupil premium funding was being used to support disadvantaged pupils' progress. Leaders have begun to respond to the outcomes of this review and have rewritten the pupil premium action plan. A recently appointed member of the senior leadership team, who is also in charge of teaching and learning, is accountable for the effect of this funding on pupils' outcomes. A governor is also linked to this aspect of the school's work. However, it is too early to show that the changes are having the desired effect on pupils' outcomes.

Governance of the school

- There is strong support from the Aldridge Education Multi-Academy Trust. Members of the trust, alongside the local governing committee, seek out opportunities for sharing good practice across trust schools. Darwen Vale is benefiting from such arrangements.
- The trust has a proven track record of school improvement. It has extremely high expectations and aspirations for the pupils at Darwen Vale.
- Members of the local governing body understand their responsibilities. They are ambitious for the well-being and learning experiences of pupils. As a group, they understand the importance of improving the quality of teaching across the school.

- The chair of governors was elected in April 2017 and a number of other governors are relatively new to the governing body. However, they have a wide range of skills, including in the education and business sectors, and are using these skills to hold leaders to account. Records of governors' meetings demonstrate the capacity of governors to support and challenge leaders effectively.
- Governors diligently fulfil all their statutory duties, such as ensuring that all safeguarding procedures are in place and under regular review.
- Governors are kept well informed through external reviews of aspects of the school's work, visits to school, discussions with staff, pupils and parents, and scrutiny of documents. This enables them to provide highly effective support and robust challenge to leaders.
- Governors know the school's context well. They are determined to ensure that all pupils are supported in becoming confident, self-assured young people and that they achieve well academically.
- Governors receive accurate information about the performance of the school. They ensure that the performance management process for staff is rigorous and fair and teachers' pay progression is linked to outcomes for pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders take pupils' safety and welfare seriously. There is a strong culture of safeguarding right across the school. Pupils have access to a range of professionals within the school should they have any concerns. Pastoral support is a strength.
- Leaders deal appropriately with incidents of bullying. They take effective action to ensure that pupils always report bullying and that staff address any concerns.
- Leaders are very committed to supporting pupils in staying safe online. They also take effective action to educate pupils about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders work effectively with a wide range of outside agencies. They have secure lines of communication with parents when safeguarding concerns arise.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Leaders have rightly introduced a new assessment system to help teachers to plan for pupils' future learning. However, it needs time to embed.
- Leaders have worked hard to secure greater consistency in terms of teachers' assessments of where pupils are in their learning. Training and support to standardise teachers' assessments are ongoing within departments and across the group of schools in the academy trust.
- Some teachers do not plan lessons that enable all pupils to make consistently good progress. Teachers sometimes set work for pupils that is too easy. This is because some teachers' expectations are not consistently high. Where this is the case, pupils do not make the progress that they should.
- In some lessons, teachers do not stretch and challenge the most able pupils to reach their potential. Leaders and teachers recognise that the most able pupils can and

should achieve more. Leaders have plans to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills to challenge pupils more consistently right across the school.

- Historically, poor-quality teaching has left wide gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders are acutely aware of this and have introduced a wide range of support programmes. For example, staff now offer teaching sessions in an additional period after school, including in English, mathematics and science. Pupils say that teachers are always willing to help them at other times. Pupils value these opportunities.
- Learning is at its best when teachers plan lessons that inspire pupils and promote independence. In these lessons, teachers plan activities which require pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and to think widely and deeply about the key concepts that they are learning.
- Where learning is most secure, teachers ask questions that deepen pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. This is particularly the case in art, drama, physical education and in English classes for the most able. In some lessons, teachers miss such opportunities and pupils' learning is limited.
- Strong support from an outstanding mathematics teacher within the trust and effective leadership from a recently appointed subject leader are resulting in improvements in the quality of teaching in mathematics. However, not all teachers provide opportunities for pupils to put their learning in context. Alongside this, the most able pupils are not always challenged to reach the levels of which they are capable.
- Most teachers create a calm and positive learning environment. This is because they establish clear and effective routines, in line with the school's behaviour policy. Pupils recognise the improvements that leaders have made to behaviour for learning.
- Where pupils learn best, for example in art, drama, physical education and in some English lessons, teachers plan lessons that require pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and to think more widely about their learning.
- Whole-school protocols for marking and feedback to pupils were developed in consultation with staff in 2016/17. These protocols focus on teachers challenging students with next-step questions and targets. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of pupils' workbooks and found inconsistencies in how the policy is being implemented within and across subjects.
- When there are other adults in the classroom to support pupils' learning and progress, teachers direct their work effectively and pupils benefit from this extra support.
- Not all teachers promote pupils' literacy and numeracy confidently. Although there is a cross-curricular literacy policy, its non-use was particularly evident in mathematics and in science, where not all teachers challenge misspelt key words. Numeracy across the curriculum is less well developed. Inspectors also noted that some teachers promote the use of calculators, even for simple arithmetic. This does not help pupils to reinforce their fluency in number and mental arithmetic skills.
- Pupils value their teachers and the commitment that they show to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers are determined that pupils will make good progress and achieve well.
- Teachers set homework. Nevertheless, some pupils said that they did not always get regular homework in all subjects. Careful thought is required to ensure that homework

deepens pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders are working hard to raise aspirations for Darwen Vale pupils. There are strong systems and processes for the provision of careers information, education, advice and guidance.
- Pupils are respectful and polite and welcoming to visitors.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for. Pupils understand how to stay safe, for example online. Parents and staff, almost unanimously, report that they feel pupils are safe and well looked after.
- The vast majority of pupils say that bullying is rare and, when it happens, it is dealt with. However, a very small number of pupils and parents said that they did not believe that staff dealt with it as quickly as they could. Inspectors found no evidence to support this during the inspection. Leaders are aware of the importance of addressing concerns and/or misconceptions and have set up a parents' forum, and other opportunities, so that parents may feel more comfortable in voicing any concerns. Governors have identified engaging with parents as a priority for further development.
- Leaders give high priority to the promotion of pupils' physical and emotional well-being. They use the support of mentors and external agencies to support vulnerable pupils.
- The provision to promote pupils' well-being means that pupils have many opportunities to grow and flourish and to develop as well-rounded, confident young people.
- Pupils are clear that everyone should be treated with respect and, during the inspection, pupils could be seen socialising easily and working well together during lessons. There are very positive relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils.
- Leaders make use of alternative education provision, when the need arises. They ensure that they carry out appropriate checks to make sure that pupils attend and behave in accordance with the school's expectations.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because of poor attendance and some pupils' misbehaviour.
- The importance of good attendance is well communicated by leaders. Staff from the pastoral team have had some success in reducing rates of absence for some pupils. However, absence and persistent absence remain too high, particularly for some disadvantaged pupils who do not attend school as regularly as they should. This is having a negative impact on their learning and progress over time.
- There is some low-level disruption in lessons when teaching fails to fully engage pupils in their learning.
- Pupils treat the school environment with respect. Litter is rarely seen in and around the

school building.

- In the main, pupils conduct themselves well during social times, including breaktimes and lunchtimes. They queue patiently and chat among themselves calmly as they wait to buy food from the canteen.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes in 2017 were very poor. Pupils made limited progress in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. This was a result of historically poor-quality teaching, an inappropriate curriculum and poor behaviour for learning. The new leadership team has started to make the necessary changes to remedy poor-quality learning and ensure that current pupils make much better progress. However, they accept that this will take time.
- Similarly, in 2017, disadvantaged pupils underachieved considerably. Over time, the actions taken by leaders have failed to remove barriers to learning for this group of pupils. The positive impact of recent actions, including leaders' response to the external review of the use of additional funding, is starting to be seen, particularly for pupils in the current Years 7 to 10.
- Pupils in the current Year 11 are beginning to make better progress, although large gaps in their knowledge and understanding remain. New leaders are doing everything they can to try to ensure that this group of pupils makes as much progress as possible. They have put in place a raft of intervention sessions and additional support, including additional after-school classes, additional time for English and mathematics during form time, special revision classes at weekends and during holidays, additional curriculum time for core subjects, and motivational sessions.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 10 have started to make much more secure progress. Leaders and teachers are taking effective action to bridge the wide gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders and teachers give freely of their time to provide additional learning opportunities. Pupils say that they now feel more confident in subjects in which they are underachieving.
- Across the school and across a range of subjects, pupils' progress and achievement are improving. This is particularly the case in English, science, history and modern foreign languages. This is because middle leaders and teachers have high aspirations for their pupils.
- Pupils' work shows that the vast majority take their learning seriously. Leaders are working hard to raise the aspirations of pupils, including the most able, and to create a 'can-do' culture. Pupils are clear that teachers expect them to work hard and achieve well.
- The progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is beginning to improve. Pupils currently in Years 7 and 8, who arrived with weak literacy and numeracy skills, are being supported through a range of strategies to improve their basic reading and number skills. These strategies are having a positive impact for the majority of the pupils concerned.
- Leaders have raised the profile of reading across the school and there are many opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills. Pupils say that they read regularly in lessons. The texts that pupils are guided towards are appropriate and

provide the right level of challenge.

- In 2017, provisional information indicates that almost all Year 11 pupils progressed to employment, education or training.

School details

Unique reference number	141321
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10036591

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

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	779
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Ian Richardson
Principal	Matthew Little
Telephone number	01254 223000
Website	www.darwenvale.com
Email address	contact@darwenvale.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- In December 2014, Darwen Vale High School opened as a new school as part of the Aldridge Education Multi-Academy Trust. There are currently nine schools within the multi-academy trust (MAT).
- The MAT has undergone a restructure from a local MAT to become a national MAT, with a regional north-west cluster. An executive principal was appointed in September 2016 to work with the north-west cluster of schools, which also includes Darwen Aldridge Community Academy, Darwen Aldridge Enterprise Studio School and Sudell Primary School.
- The previous headteacher left in 2016 and an acting principal led the school until the appointment of the current principal in June 2017.

- The values of the multi-academy trust focus on the development of entrepreneurial characteristics. The characteristics at the heart of the trust's values include creativity, passion, determination, problem solving, risk taking and teamwork.
- Darwen Vale High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well above the national average.
- The vast majority of pupils who attend the school are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The school does not meet the government's floor standards.
- Some pupils access full-time alternative provision at the local pupil referral unit.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 38 lessons, across a wide range of subjects and ability ranges and across both key stages. Four lessons were jointly observed with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also listened to some pupils in Years 7 and 8 read and they spoke to the pupils about their reading experiences.
- A detailed analysis of current pupils' work was completed by the inspection team.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal and other senior leaders, several middle leaders, a group of teachers and members of the governing body. Inspectors also met with representatives of the Aldridge Education Multi-Academy Trust.
- Throughout the two days, inspectors spoke with different groups of pupils, both formally and informally, about their experiences, their learning and their safety.
- Inspectors observed movement around the school's site. They also observed social times and were in the dining areas on both days of the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. They also reviewed the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings and information relating to current pupils' progress.
- Inspectors looked at the 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors analysed the 54 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and the 109 responses from pupils.

Inspection team

Helen Gaunt, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Osama Abdul Rahim	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Hanbury	Ofsted Inspector
David Hampson	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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