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Mrs Nicola Davis
Executive Principal
Aldersley High School
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Dear Mrs Davis

Short inspection of Aldersley High School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 2018 with Paul Elliott, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Leaders are passionate about the school and ambitious to improve wider standards through working with school leaders locally. The Amethyst Academies Trust was set up since the last inspection. This comprises two schools working together under your leadership. In addition, you have recently been appointed as a national leader of education. This further reflects your objectives, the effective work you have done across schools and the capacity for further improvements.

Your pupils are friendly and welcoming. Pupils speak highly of the teaching, support and opportunities they receive. Pupils say that they are happy, make friends and feel safe. Every pupil spoken to by inspectors, when asked, would recommend the school to others. Older pupils feel that the school has improved, especially over the past two years. Standards of behaviour are generally high and pupils are almost always engaged in their learning in lessons.

Most staff and parents and carers are supportive of the school. A typical parent comment indicated that this is 'a great school with a dedicated team of staff who ensure that children are the priority, giving the children total support both academically and pastorally.'

Leaders and trustees have successfully addressed the recommendations from the previous inspection and have focused on improving teaching quality. For example, a programme of continuing professional development allows teachers to gain externally recognised qualifications. These improve teachers' current practices.

In 2016 and 2017, pupils' overall progress was above the national average. However, outcomes for girls were far higher than those for boys, particularly in English. Boys' rates of progress are improving, but differences do remain. In the past, many pupils gained the European Computer Driving Licence qualification, which improved outcomes but was not sufficiently challenging. Leaders have addressed this issue and pupils now follow qualifications which are more appropriate, given their skills in information and communication technology. The school's curriculum for pupils following GCSE programmes in Years 9 and 10 is now far more academic and better meets pupils' needs and aspirations.

Leaders are committed to improving pupils' employability skills. The inspection took place during National Careers Week, and inspectors saw pupils given beneficial opportunities to discuss and learn about various career opportunities. Leaders believe that developing debating and public-speaking skills will enable pupils to improve their learning and be even better prepared for future careers. Pupils regularly address their classmates formally, including discussing topics such as their hobbies and interests.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders constantly reinforce the importance of pupil welfare in discussions. Leaders know their pupils well, including any specific risks to which they might be exposed in the locality. School systems for ensuring that people working with pupils are safe to do so are carefully completed. Records relating to checks on staff's backgrounds are reviewed regularly by a school leader and a director. Pupils feel that the school is a safe environment. They are clear on how to report any concerns about themselves or their friends. Moreover, pupils are confident that these will be addressed effectively. At the beginning of my meeting with those responsible for governance, one of the directors stated, 'Safeguarding is our priority.' Inspection evidence supports this view.

Inspection findings

- Over time, boys' progress in English has been slow. In 2017, boys made less progress than boys in other schools, and significantly less progress than girls at Aldersley High School. Leaders have begun to address this issue, but school information shows that the progress made by boys overall at key stage 4 is still well below that of girls. The gaps are closing, however, at key stage 3.
- The quality of learning seen during the inspection in lessons and books in English and mathematics was strong. Pupils are engaged in their learning because of teachers' well-planned lessons and their strong relationships with pupils. Questioning is well targeted and leads to challenging discussions. Pupils know their target grades and how to improve their work, although girls were more assured about this than boys.

- High standards of behaviour and engagement are evident in lessons, with only some minor variation. Pupils attend regularly because they enjoy school. The school's attendance rate is consistently above the national average. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes at social times are excellent. Pupils say that bullying is rare and are confident that if it happened it would be dealt with appropriately by school staff.
- In the past, only a very small proportion of pupils took the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). These proportions have been well below the national average, especially for boys. The proportion of pupils currently in Years 9 and 10 following qualifications that lead to the EBacc is very high.
- As a result of leaders' actions, the curriculum is now more academic and relevant to pupils, allowing them to more successfully access employment and higher education opportunities. Leaders rightly feel that more work is required to improve teachers' subject knowledge and to develop cross-departmental links for pupils to achieve highly in this new curriculum. Current school assessment information, particularly for key stage 4, would support this view.
- Pupils appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities on offer at the school. They also speak highly of the careers education programme. Inspectors were impressed by how often the term 'employability' was used by leaders, including directors. There is a clear commitment to help pupils move on appropriately to the next stage of their learning and careers.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is effusive. However, leaders do not always precisely identify areas of underperformance, such as boys' slow progress in English at key stage 4. Additionally, planning for development does not always clearly focus specifically on the areas where the most improvement is needed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of boys accelerates further so that their attainment matches the higher standards achieved by girls
- the quality of the school's curriculum continues to develop so that it allows pupils a wide range of opportunities when they leave school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Griffiths
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior team, middle leaders, four directors including the chair and vice-chair of the trust board, and a representative of the local authority. We spoke with pupils formally and informally about their learning and their views on wider aspects of the life of the school. We visited classrooms and looked at pupils' books. We reviewed staff and parent questionnaires. We evaluated safeguarding, including employment checks, and looked at how effectively safeguarding permeates the culture of the school.