

Essa Academy

Lever Edge Lane, Bolton, Greater Manchester BL3 3HH

Inspection dates

15–16 May 2018

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress and attainment are not good across a wide range of subjects because the quality of teaching is inconsistent. Teachers do not routinely match work to pupils' needs and abilities as well as they should.
- Teachers do not support the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills effectively.
- The assessment system is weak. It does not help teachers to provide pupils with work that challenges them to make strong progress. It does not provide middle leaders with precise enough information to improve teaching in their areas and drive up pupils' academic standards.
- Leaders do not have a sharp enough understanding of the impact of additional funding on the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils and those needing to catch up in Year 7.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are benefiting from improved provision, but their needs are not always met in lessons and their progress is not tracked closely. Low attendance impairs achievement for this group, as it does for disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders do not ensure that parents and carers and are fully on board with the school's improvement plans.
- Occasionally, pupils' learning is hampered by low-level disruption, especially from boys, because some teachers do not tackle weaker behaviour firmly enough.
- Teachers' skills in supporting pupils who are at the early stages of speaking English as an additional language, or who are new to the country, are underdeveloped. Consequently, these pupils do not receive effective support in lessons.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher is very ambitious on behalf of his pupils. He has the full support of his senior leaders, who are equally uncompromising in their desire for pupils to have the best possible life chances.
- Leaders have recently made significant changes to the curriculum. These changes are having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Pupils value and celebrate cultural diversity.
- The trust and governing body have an accurate understanding of the quality of education that the school provides.
- School leaders have demonstrated convincingly the capacity for further improvement; for example, overall attendance has improved and is now close to the national average.
- Staff ensure that pupils are safe and their physical and emotional needs are well met.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that pupils make the progress of which they are capable, by:
 - improving teachers' use of information about pupils' prior knowledge, skills and understanding, so that they can better match learning activities to pupils' needs
 - strengthening the teaching of literacy, numeracy and communication skills across the curriculum so that pupils have the necessary basic skills to be successful learners
 - improving the level of challenge so that pupils, regardless of their prior attainment, are suitably stretched to achieve their potential
 - providing effective support for pupils with additional language barriers, such as those who are at the early stages of speaking English as an additional language.
- Continue to strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the much needed changes being made to the curriculum are robustly monitored and that the impact on outcomes is evaluated systematically
 - the school's partnership work with parents is strengthened so that they have a clear understanding of leaders' vision for the school
 - the use of additional funding is refined so that it has a demonstrable impact on pupils' outcomes
 - the assessment system used for setting pupils' targets and reviewing their progress reflects the ambition that leaders have for pupils' achievement and provides middle leaders with the information that they need to improve teaching in their areas.
- Ensure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make the progress that they are capable of by:
 - making sure that all teachers are aware of, and plan effectively for, their specific needs
 - tracking the progress of these pupils more closely.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and personal development by:
 - ensuring that staff closely follow the requirements of the new behaviour policy so that low-level disruption is eradicated
 - supporting pupils more effectively to develop consistently positive attitudes to their learning
 - strengthening the school's systems for improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have had limited success addressing the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. Furthermore, instability at senior leadership and trust level has contributed to a decline in the quality of teaching, assessment and pupils' behaviour. As a result of this deterioration, pupils' performance in external examinations has declined. For example, in 2017, a smaller proportion of pupils attained strong passes in English and mathematics than the national average.
- Since September 2017, new leaders have begun to address the issues that have caused the school's decline. A new chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust was appointed in 2016 and he has overseen a transformation in the composition of the school's senior leadership team. The new headteacher took up post in September 2017 and has left no stone unturned in his quest to create a shared understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the standard of education that the school provides.
- The headteacher, supported by a committed and cohesive senior leadership team, has created a clear vision for the school. He has taken swift action to address the weaknesses he uncovered when he took up post in September 2017. With the support of the trust, he has taken appropriate action to strengthen leadership in the school. Despite this, leaders are still in the relatively early stages of their efforts to improve teaching and other aspects of the school's work. Many leaders have only recently assumed the roles that they currently fulfil. As a result, the impact of their work remains inconsistent and the school requires improvement.
- The headteacher has provided highly effective leadership under challenging circumstances. He has tackled head-on many of the issues that required urgent attention, including long-standing staffing concerns. He has high expectations of staff, many of whom welcome his direct approach to addressing the issues that have impeded pupils' progress. Most are fully supportive of the changes he has implemented since his appointment.
- Leaders have begun to have an impact on addressing the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment that they inherited. This can be seen most clearly in humanities, where pupils' progress is improving rapidly after a very long period in which pupils made very slow progress.
- In recent years, the system used for assessing pupils and tracking their progress has not been good enough and has contributed to the weaknesses that have emerged in the quality of teaching. The system has not captured useful information about what pupils know and can do. As a result, this has contributed to weaknesses in teaching. In particular, the system has not supported teachers effectively to provide pupils of different abilities with work that is well matched to their needs and abilities.
- Over time, leaders' system for tracking pupils' progress has been insufficiently ambitious. Pupils have not been set individual targets that challenge them to make rapid progress from their individual starting points. Furthermore, middle leaders have not been trained well enough to use the information about pupils' progress in their subjects. This has contributed to most middle leaders' inability to prevent the decline in

the quality of teaching in their areas.

- Since September, leaders have made good use of effective external support from a local teaching school and the local authority to identify appropriate steps to address urgent school priorities. Leaders are now taking decisive steps to implement strategies, including staff training, which are based on an accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching across the school.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have not ensured that the curriculum meets the needs of all groups of pupils. In particular, pupils who are in the early stages of speaking English as an additional language have not followed a curriculum that enables them to make strong progress. Furthermore, the curriculum has not provided sufficient challenge for pupils of middle and high ability. Moreover, leaders have not ensured that the curriculum facilitates the effective development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills. The curriculum has been redesigned and personalised because it was not meeting the needs of all pupils. It is now broad and balanced.
- In addition to the taught curriculum, a carefully crafted programme called the 'Essa Experience' has been introduced to raise pupils' aspirations. It provides a plethora of opportunities for pupils to develop their skills so that they are ready for life in modern Britain. For example, pupils benefit from 'Young Enterprise' challenges and take part in a wide range of visits, including university visits, which start in Year 7.
- Leaders' use of additional funding has been weak over time. In particular, leaders' use of the pupil premium has had minimal impact on accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils or improving their attendance. Leaders' use of the additional funding to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has been similarly poor historically. However, there are clear signs that leaders are beginning to use this funding in a more discerning fashion. For example, the funding has been used to improve the training that teaching assistants receive. As a result, these members of staff have started to support pupils more effectively and inspectors observed several examples of teaching assistants questioning pupils well and challenging pupils to think deeply for themselves.
- The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator leads with moral purpose and has made significant improvements to the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in a short period of time. For example, she has worked closely with pastoral leaders to establish a nurturing provision to support pupils who are at risk of exclusion. The early signs clearly indicate that this provision is helping pupils to regulate their own behaviour more effectively and reintegrate into mainstream lessons successfully. Despite these improvements, current arrangements for tracking the progress made by pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities as a group remains ineffective.
- Since the previous inspection, middle leaders have not been supported effectively to improve teaching in their areas. In many cases, their efforts have been undermined by instability at senior leadership level and flawed assessment systems. Despite this, it is clearly evident that middle leadership is improving quickly. Many middle leaders now ensure that teachers have higher expectations of pupils' capabilities. They monitor the quality of teaching in their areas effectively and use information from their monitoring to establish clear and appropriate strategies to develop teaching further.
- Attendance has improved considerably since the previous inspection, but school leaders

recognise that this remains a work in progress. As a result, leaders have introduced new systems to improve attendance further. These include rewards for good attendance and support for individual pupils who do not attend school regularly. The school has communicated a clear message to pupils and parents that attending school every day is vitally important. As a result of this work, current rates of attendance are close to historical national averages for the first time in a long while. Despite this, leaders are acutely aware that many disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities continue to be absent from school too regularly.

- The school prides itself on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It is prioritised in several subjects and through additional activities. Pupils confidently shared with inspectors their understanding, appreciation and celebration of British values. Pupils respect differences and value diversity.
- Parental views regarding the leadership of the school are mixed. The necessary changes that have been rapidly introduced to improve achievement have caused a degree of uncertainty. The majority of the parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire do not feel that the school responds well to their concerns.

Governance of the school

- The trustees and governors appreciate the difference that the headteacher is making. They respect the way in which he has been prepared to make difficult decisions, including those related to staffing. They are fully supportive of the changes that have been made.
- There has recently been significant staff turnover. However, the trust has backed the new headteacher's innovative strategies to attract the best teachers to the academy.
- Over time, trustees have not ensured that the additional funding received for pupils who are disadvantaged has been used effectively. This funding has not been successfully accounted for or evaluated. Similarly, the monitoring of the literacy and numeracy catch-up funding is not robust.
- The local governing body has been strengthened during this academic year by the appointment of members with considerable educational experience. As a result, they are beginning to provide more effective challenge to the school.
- Governors know the school well. They understand the dynamics of the local area and appreciate the importance of building positive relationships with all parents. They are holding leaders to account so that recent improvements to teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance are used as a springboard for further improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The newly appointed safeguarding lead is highly skilled and has 'hit the ground running'. She has been very thorough in ensuring that staff are held to account for pupils' welfare and safety.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe. Pupils are given clear messages about how to look after themselves online. They confirmed that they had learned a great deal about

safety in lessons and assemblies. The Ofsted survey and school information indicate that a substantial majority of parents agree that their children are safe at school, happy and well looked after.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, pupils have experienced teaching of mixed quality. In the humanities subjects, particularly in Year 10 and Year 11, many pupils have been disadvantaged by a deficit of skills and knowledge caused by a legacy of ineffective curriculum planning and poor teaching.
- There are clear signs that teaching is improving and that historical weaknesses are being addressed. Leaders have ensured that teachers are developing higher expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. Teachers are improving the extent to which their teaching caters for pupils' different needs and abilities. However, the quality of teaching is not good because too many inconsistencies remain across different subjects and for different groups of pupils.
- Teachers do not support the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills across the curriculum. Teachers do not give enough attention to developing the depth and fluency of pupils' written work. Furthermore, leaders have not ensured that pupils' numeracy skills are developed systematically in subjects other than mathematics.
- Teachers use questioning with mixed success. Some questioning probes and extends pupils' understanding well, tackles misconceptions and encourages pupils to develop their speaking skills. For example, in a Year 9 Urdu lesson, highly effective questioning challenged all pupils to think deeply. On other occasions, teachers are too accepting of pupils' brief and underdeveloped answers.
- Historical weaknesses in the school's assessment system have hindered teachers' efforts to plan effectively for pupils with different starting points. Leaders have begun to make improvements to assessment, which is being embraced by some teachers. For example, teachers of mathematics, science and humanities are now using information about what pupils know and can do more capably to help them to plan work that challenges pupils of all abilities and to address pupils' misconceptions. However, this is not the case in all subjects and, as a result, significant variability remains in the extent to which teachers provide pupils of all abilities with work that challenges them to make strong progress.
- Teachers do not provide the most able pupils with the routine and systematic challenge that is required for them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Although teachers are developing higher expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving, they do not have consistently high expectations of how hard pupils should work. Moreover, pupils have not been supported effectively over time to become resilient and enthusiastic learners. Some pupils give up too easily, particularly when they find the work too easy or too difficult.
- Leaders have introduced better systems for identifying pupils' needs, especially for those who have an education, health and care plan. However, leaders recognise that the quality of teaching for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is not consistently

good.

- Teachers have not been well trained to support pupils who are at the early stages of speaking English as an additional language. As a result, pupils with little or no English do not receive consistently effective support in the classroom.
- Teaching does not routinely support pupils to become confident learners. Some pupils have not developed the communication skills that they need to be successful learners.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement because pupils have not been supported systematically to develop positive attitudes to all aspects of their learning.
- Pupils receive effective careers advice and guidance. Pupils benefit from high-quality advice from Year 7 onwards from the school's knowledgeable careers specialist. Pupils are supported to make informed choices and develop their career prospects. For example, during the inspection, Year 8 pupils were on a university visit designed to raise their aspirations. Pupils across all year groups are positive about the range of experiences they are exposed to and the support they receive.
- Staff are considerate of pupils' social and emotional needs. Pupils say that they can always talk to an adult and that they feel that they will be supported to cope with any worries. The school's additional needs team provides a sanctuary for pupils who need a quiet space to go to. Vulnerable pupils are positive about the additional clubs and opportunities that have been created for them. One pupil said she felt valued by the staff that she works with.
- Leaders' actions to support pupils' transition from primary school are effective. Pupils in Year 7 are very positive about their experiences at the school. They say the school is 'a happy place to grow up in'. A substantial majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire also agree that their child is happy at the school.
- A large majority of pupils who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said that the school encourages them to take responsibility for their mental, physical and emotional health.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because low-level disruption, particularly from boys, sometimes impedes learning. Pupils in all year groups told inspectors that some of their lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. Leaders agree with this view and inspectors' observations confirmed that low-level disruption interrupts the flow of some lessons. Typically, pupils misbehave if the work that they have been set does not match their needs or if teachers are inconsistent in the way that they deal with challenging behaviour.
- To address this, leaders have introduced an unambiguous approach to managing behaviour that has drawn a clear 'line in the sand' and established high expectations. As a result, fewer pupils are late to school and pupils across all year groups say that

behaviour is improving around the school and in their classes.

- Pupils are typically welcoming, polite and well-mannered. Most wear their uniform with pride.
- The pupils spoken to by inspectors said that bullying was not a problem and, if it happened, it was handled by teachers well. This is also the view of the majority of the pupils who completed the online survey.
- Pupils' attendance has improved significantly since the previous inspection and, for the first time in a long while, is close to historical national averages. Leaders have prioritised the improvement of pupils' attendance and have strengthened the strategic leadership of this area of the school's work considerably. The school now works effectively with parents to improve attendance. Despite this, rates of absence among disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities remain high. Although leaders have engineered minor incremental improvements to the attendance of these groups, too many of these pupils regularly have time off school.
- The number of pupils who receive repeated fixed-term exclusions has reduced significantly and many strategies have been introduced to support pupils who are at risk of being excluded. For example, a new and innovative programme is helping pupils to manage their own behaviour more effectively. The 'Ivy Cottage' offers a calm learning environment where a bespoke short-term curriculum provides pupils with intensive support. Pupils speak positively of the impact that it has had on their behaviour and leaders can highlight several examples where pupils have been reintegrated back into mainstream lessons successfully.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, weaknesses in teaching have led to a gradual slowing in the amount of progress that pupils make at the school. For the last two years, results attained by Year 11 pupils in external examinations have indicated that pupils have made broadly average progress across the curriculum from their different starting points. However, this has masked the fact that the largest cohort of pupils, those with broadly average prior attainment from primary school, have made significantly less progress than all pupils nationally with similar starting points. It also masks the fact that the proportion of pupils who attain a strong pass in English and mathematics has fallen significantly and now compares unfavourably to the national average. Added to this, the amount of progress that pupils have made in humanities has been very low for a number of years.
- Leaders are aware that pupils' outcomes remain fragile and have implemented a number of strategies to accelerate pupils' progress through improved teaching and assessment. However, because the impact of these improvements is inconsistent, outcomes for pupils require improvement.
- Outcomes in history, geography and religious education have been too low for some time. However, they are quickly improving because teachers and leaders in these areas have embraced the changes that leaders have made to teaching and assessment.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to other pupils in the school and those nationally with similar starting points. This is confirmed by the performance of

disadvantaged pupils in external examinations over time and the school's own information about the progress of pupils currently at the school.

- The progress for middle prior-attaining pupils was a significant weakness in 2017. These pupils are now making better progress across a range of subjects, and particularly in mathematics, because leaders have made it a priority to improve teaching for this group.
- The majority of pupils speak English as an additional language. These pupils have a range of starting points. They make progress that is broadly in line with the national average across a range of subjects. However, their progress in English is less strong as a result of weaknesses in the teaching of literacy skills to this group.
- Despite these improvements, weaknesses in outcomes remain. In particular, the improvements are not seen uniformly across the curriculum. For example, in English, leaders' information about Year 11 pupils' current attainment indicates that they have been unable to capitalise on the improvements in outcomes that were seen in the 2017 GCSE examinations. In particular, leaders' information indicates that the most able pupils are no longer making good progress in English.
- A substantial number of pupils join the school part-way through their schooling. The majority of these are new arrivals to this country. These pupils do not always get effective support and this is an impediment to their progress.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities do not make strong enough progress from their starting points because teaching does not consistently meet their needs.
- Across key stage 3, the progress made by pupils is variable. Pupils with low prior attainment are being well supported and make good progress. Internal data provided by the school indicates that the most able pupils are not making good enough progress towards their target grades across key stage 3.
- The proportion of pupils who advance to further education, skills and training is below the national average, but it is improving. This is because pupils' futures are a high priority to school leaders and the advice and guidance pupils receive are well matched to their needs and aspirations.

School details

Unique reference number	135770
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10043223

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	917
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Anwer Ibrahim Patel
Headteacher	Martin Knowles
Telephone number	01204 333222
Website	www.essaacademy.org
Email address	info@essaacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	16 January 2014

Information about this school

- The academy is a member of a small multi-academy trust (MAT), the Essa Foundation Academy Trust (EFAT). A trust board oversees the work of all schools in the MAT and a local governing body has delegated responsibility for setting the direction of the academy.
- A new CEO was appointed in 2016. A new headteacher took up post in September 2017.
- Substantial staffing changes have taken place since the previous inspection and this will continue in the autumn term.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background is well above average, as is the proportion of boys. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is also well above average.

- The proportion of pupils who require an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs is lower than the national average.
- A significant number of pupils join the school without information about their key stage 2 attainment. This is mainly because they are new arrivals to the country. These pupils join the school at different points during their secondary education.
- No use is made of alternative off-site provision.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons and observed teaching and learning across a number of different subjects and ability groups and in form time. Some observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at the work of pupils currently in the school, both in classrooms and through a detailed work scrutiny.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, the EFAT CEO, the school improvement partner, subject leaders, pastoral leaders, teachers and pupils.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including: the school's past performance data; information about pupils' current progress; leaders' self-evaluation; reports and reviews commissioned by the school; governing body minutes; performance management information; reports to parents; curriculum information; school policies; information on the school's website; behaviour records; safeguarding procedures; professional development records; and SEN case studies.
- The views of 89 parents, given in response to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. In addition to speaking to pupils in lessons, around the school and in formal meetings, the 214 responses to the Ofsted pupil survey were analysed. Staff views were also considered as part of the inspection evidence.

Inspection team

Deborah Bailey, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
David Hampson	Ofsted Inspector
John Leigh	Ofsted Inspector
David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

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

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

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

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

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

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018