

Discovery Academy

Discovery Drive, Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST2 0GA

Inspection dates

22–23 January 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have transferred pupils from the school's roll during Year 11, when this was not in the pupils' best interests. This constitutes off-rolling according to Ofsted's definition. The practice ceased during the inspection.
- The school has improved since its previous inspection. All staff are very committed to seeing the school improve further. They form a united and hard-working team.
- Leaders and governors provide a curriculum that contains innovative elements in all years. The curriculum meets pupils' needs well. However, not all pupils in key stage 3 study music.
- Leaders know the school well. They identify weaknesses by carefully analysing the available evidence. Consequently, their strategies to address weaknesses are thoughtful, considered and effective.
- Teaching is good and continues to improve. Teachers are very committed to improving their practice and work together well to do so. Although lessons are usually well planned, at times activities are not as well matched to pupils' abilities as they could be.
- Relationships are strong across the school. Pupils like and trust their teachers. Teachers use questioning well to check on pupils' knowledge and to deepen their understanding of their work.
- Leaders' and teachers' efforts to improve pupils' reading are proving successful. However, teachers in some subjects are not consistently promoting accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Pupils currently in the school make good progress in all years and in most subjects. However, the most able pupils make slightly weaker progress than others.
- Vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and children looked after, make good progress. Staff provide high-quality care and support for these pupils.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. Disruption to learning is rare. Almost all pupils work hard and are keen to do well.
- The school is calm and orderly throughout the day. Pupils behave well at social times. They move around the school sensibly. They are smartly dressed, courteous and polite. Pupils are very proud of their school.
- A strong culture of care and support exists throughout the school. Consequently, pupils feel safe and are safe in school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The trust should ensure that the practice of 'off-rolling' that has now ceased is not returned to.
- Improve teaching so that pupils, including the most able, make strong progress in all subjects by ensuring that teachers:
 - consistently plan activities that are well matched to pupils' abilities and challenge the most able
 - in all subjects, promote accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Ensure that all pupils in key stage 3 are able to study music.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Ten pupils in Year 11, who were on the school's roll but attending good-quality alternative provision, were transferred to the alternative provider's roll in January 2018. This means that these pupils are not represented in any published information about Discovery Academy, for example data about pupils' progress or their destinations after leaving school. Consequently, published information about Discovery Academy for 2018 does not take account of all the pupils who were on roll for all or most of Years 10 and 11. The transfer off roll was carried out using procedures agreed with local schools and the local authority (LA), and therefore with the full knowledge of these partners. Leaders and LA officers could not provide inspectors with any convincing reason for this practice. Inspectors concluded that it provided no benefit for the pupils and was carried out in the best interests of the school rather than the pupils. This constitutes 'off-rolling' according to Ofsted's definition. Leaders had planned to off-roll a smaller number of pupils in January 2019, but, because the school ceased this practice during the inspection, no pupils left the roll at this time.
- Despite the weakness identified of the school's practice of off-rolling, leaders and governors 'expect excellence' of staff and pupils. Staff fully support the school's aims and are very committed to seeing it continue to improve. They give of their time generously, for example in providing a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities for pupils. Almost all the 141 staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire said the school is well led and that they are proud to work there.
- Parents and carers are positive in their views about the school. For example, almost all parents who responded to Parent View said that the school is well led and managed and that their children are well looked after and well taught in school. One parent spoke for many when they wrote: 'Discovery Academy is fully committed to their pupils and want the very best for every child. I cannot thank the school enough for improving my child's outcomes both from an academic and emotional perspective.'
- Leaders have invested considerable time in seeking to develop a curriculum that is demanding and that meets the needs of pupils. They are clear about the aims of their curriculum, for example to encourage high aspirations and resilience in pupils. In many respects, the curriculum now provides well for pupils. For example, leaders have introduced a 'resilience curriculum' in key stage 3 in which pupils benefit from a very wide range of options that they study for half of a term. These include performing arts, public speaking, learning Japanese and local off-site visits. These activities successfully engage and enthuse pupils, while broadening their educational horizons. However, although pupils can learn musical instruments in school, they are not currently taught music. This is a legacy of the school's previous inability to recruit a music teacher.
- The curriculum in key stage 4 provides many choices for pupils, well matched to their abilities and interests. Most pupils study a traditional academic curriculum that includes science, history or geography and a foreign language. Some pupils study both history and geography and some take two languages. Approximately one quarter of pupils choose to study either engineering or manufacturing for part of one day each week at a site a little distance from the school. Pupils told inspectors how much they enjoyed

this vocational option. Leaders regularly review and evaluate the curriculum, making changes when they feel these would be in pupils' best interests.

- A well-planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme, taught each week, contributes well to pupils' personal development. These lessons are supplemented by weekly assemblies, delivered by school staff and outside speakers, such as the police. Consequently, pupils develop a good knowledge of how to keep themselves safe, for example from people with extreme views. They develop a good understanding of the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance and what these mean to a young person growing up in Stoke-on-Trent. Together, the school's ethos, the formal curriculum and the wide range of enrichment activities contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders at all levels use information effectively about how well pupils are learning. They carefully analyse information about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance to identify questions that need answering or issues that need addressing. Leaders do not collect data unnecessarily or for its own sake. Leaders then target strategies well to address weaknesses. For example, middle leaders use assessment information to identify pupils who are beginning to fall behind with their work. They then provide extra support to help them catch up and check that it has had the intended impact. Similarly, senior leaders use information about absence to plan their actions. For example, as a result of having identified issues contributing to some pupils' high levels of absence, the school provides a free breakfast for all pupils and staff visit pupils' homes on their first day of absence and bring them into school if appropriate.
- Senior and middle leaders' work to improve teaching has proved successful since the previous inspection and it continues to be so. Their regular checks on teaching identify areas where improvement is needed and where good practice is worthy of sharing. Issues might apply to individual members of staff or more widely to a department. Each department has time allocated each week when teachers work together to address weaknesses or share effective practice. For example, all teachers are involved in a project where parts of their lessons are filmed and then discussed with colleagues. Almost all staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that leaders use professional development well to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement. None disagreed.
- Strong leadership ensures that vulnerable pupils, including those with SEND and children looked after, are well cared for and given high-quality support. Staff know these pupils well, including their individual needs. They produce clear plans to meet these needs and communicate this information well to those who need to know, such as class teachers. Leaders regularly check on these pupils' well-being and academic progress and amend plans when necessary. Consequently, pupils with SEND and children looked after make good progress in school.
- Most pupils in the school are disadvantaged. Leaders make effective use of the pupil premium to support these pupils. They use many appropriate strategies to support disadvantaged pupils, ranging from providing a free breakfast, to ensuring that they take part in off-site visits and providing additional academic support if they begin to fall behind with their work. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils make similar good progress as other pupils in the school and the difference between their progress and

that of other pupils nationally is reducing.

Governance of the school

- Governors and trustees have failed to hold leaders to account for the off-rolling of pupils in January 2018. They have not ensured that leaders have acted in a transparent and accountable way.
- Members of the local governing body (LGB) are knowledgeable and committed to the school's aim of providing a good education for its pupils. The LGB contains an appropriate range of skills and experience. Its members know the school well and provide appropriate support and challenge to senior and middle leaders in most areas. For example, subject leaders regularly meet with governors, who question them about teaching and standards within their subjects.
- The Alpha Academies Trust Board mostly provides effective scrutiny of the LGB's work. Its composition is currently being revised to provide greater separation of personnel between it and the LGBs of the trust's schools.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties with diligence. For example, they check that safeguarding arrangements are effective and they provide detailed scrutiny of the school's use of additional funding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding policies and procedures are clear and fit for purpose. They have comprehensively trained staff to spot the signs that pupils might need extra support. Consequently, staff readily pass on to leaders any concerns they have about pupils. Leaders deal quickly with concerns reported to them, seeking advice from the LA when they need it. Leaders work closely with a range of outside agencies to ensure that pupils get appropriate and timely support.
- Safeguarding is well led and has the highest priority in the school. Consequently, a strong culture of keeping pupils safe and caring for them exists across the school. Almost all staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that pupils are safe in the school, and none disagreed. Almost all parents who completed Parent View agreed that pupils feel safe and are well looked after in the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and it continues to improve. Teachers use questions well to check that pupils understand the work they are studying. They also use questions successfully to draw out more detailed answers from pupils, rather than accepting brief and shallow responses. This serves to deepen pupils' understanding of their work.
- Relationships are very positive. Teachers and pupils know that classrooms are places of learning and high standards are expected. Because pupils trust their teachers, they are willing to attempt challenging work when it is set, to ask questions and to offer answers. Pupils also support each other well.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use this well when explaining concepts to pupils. Teachers generally plan activities that are well matched to pupils' abilities and needs. However, at times teachers do not provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils and they make less progress than they could as a result. Less commonly, but occasionally, the tasks that teachers plan are too difficult for some low-attaining pupils and they find it difficult to begin those tasks.
- Pupils with SEND are taught well. Teachers use information about these pupils' specific needs well to plan appropriate work. Teaching assistants provide good support in class, especially for pupils who have education, health and care plans. Staff provide high-quality support and extra help at other times, and this ensures that pupils with SEND do not fall behind with their learning.
- Teachers' promotion of some aspects of literacy is proving successful. They provide strong support for pupils who find reading difficult, and these pupils' reading improves strongly as a result. Concerted efforts to broaden pupils' vocabulary are also proving successful. Teachers display and discuss key, subject-specific vocabulary and insist that pupils use correct technical words in their responses. The quality of pupils' writing remains variable. The impact of teachers' efforts to ensure that pupils spell and punctuate accurately is mixed. In some subjects, including English, teachers expect pupils to write accurately, but some teachers do not expect the same in other subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils are confident, articulate and polite. They have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to succeed in education. They are smartly dressed and very proud to belong to their school.
- Pupils feel safe in the school. All pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed this fact, as did the vast majority of those who responded to the Ofsted pupil inspection survey. Pupils told inspectors that bullying is very rare and that staff deal well with any that does happen. Furthermore, pupils told inspectors they have confidence in the school's adults to help them with any problems they might face. Pupils are well cared for and supported in this school.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe because of regular reminders from staff and outside speakers in PSHE lessons and assemblies. For example, teaching in information technology lessons and reminders in assemblies ensure that pupils know how to use the internet and social media safely. Assemblies delivered by the police help pupils to keep themselves safe when in the community, for example during school holidays. PSHE lessons and assemblies ensure that pupils understand the potential dangers from people with radical or extreme views.
- A well-organised careers education programme in all years ensures that pupils are well informed when making subject choices and in deciding what to do when they leave Year 11. Leaders regularly review careers provision using good practice benchmarks. The school has particularly good links with local employers, which it uses well, for example in arranging work-experience placements for pupils. Almost all pupils who

leave the school in Year 11 move to education or training.

- The school has a high number of children looked after. Staff support these pupils very well. For example, leaders provide teachers with detailed information that helps them plan appropriate work. Teachers use this information well and these pupils make good progress as a result. Most rarely miss a day of school.
- The school makes use of alternative provision (AP) where pupils attend an alternative provider instead of school. Its use of AP has reduced considerably over recent years. All providers are checked and quality assured by the LA through its Learning Partnership arrangements. Leaders ensure that pupils attend appropriate AP that helps to meet their needs, having already tried many strategies to do so in the school. These pupils are well supported by school staff and a key worker provided by the LA. School and LA staff make regular checks on pupils' attendance, behaviour and progress. If provision is not successful, it is reviewed and changed. As a consequence of this careful planning and regular review, these pupils remain in education, achieve appropriate qualifications and move into further education or training at the end of Year 11. In the past, some of these pupils left the school's roll in January of Year 11 and were moved onto the roll of the AP provider. This undermined the school's accountability and transparency. The practice ceased during the inspection.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They are attentive and respectful. They work hard and are keen to do well. Pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed that behaviour is typically good in lessons and that disruption to learning is rare.
- The school is calm and orderly throughout the day. Pupils behave maturely at breaktime and lunchtime. They move around the building quickly and sensibly between lessons. Almost all arrive in school promptly at the start of the day, appropriately equipped and ready to learn.
- Leaders use exclusion appropriately, as a sanction of last resort. They always seek to use alternatives to exclusion whenever possible. Their use of fixed-term exclusion has increased this year, as they have raised expectations of behaviour. This has contributed to the good behaviour within the school. Leaders' use of alternative provision placements for some pupils at risk of permanent exclusion has successfully ensured that these pupils are not permanently excluded and remain in full-time education.
- Attendance remains below the national average for secondary schools but is improving. It is now broadly similar to average attendance in schools in a similar context. Improvement has been secured through a wide range of successful strategies, including visiting pupils' homes on their first day of absence. The number of pupils who are regularly absent from school is steadily falling.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Current pupils are making good progress from their starting points in all years. They

are benefiting from good and improving teaching in almost all subjects. In subjects where published examination results have in the past been weaker, for example in English, considerable improvement is now evident in the school.

- High prior-attaining pupils make slightly weaker progress than low and middle prior-attaining pupils. The most able pupils are not always challenged in lessons as much as they could be.
- Strong progress for current pupils is now evident in several subjects, including mathematics. Effective teaching is supplemented by extra help should pupils begin to fall behind with their work.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress. Teachers generally plan activities that support these pupils well. Teaching assistants and other staff provide high-quality academic and pastoral support that ensures that pupils with SEND can successfully complete their work.
- Most pupils in the school are disadvantaged. They make good progress in almost all subjects. In common with all pupils, they are well taught and teachers provide timely additional help when they need it.
- Children looked after make good progress. Staff support them very well and help to ensure that any barriers to learning they have are overcome.
- Many pupils join the school with literacy levels below those typical for pupils of their age. Leaders' efforts to improve pupils' literacy are proving successful, especially in improving pupils' reading. In other areas of literacy, including writing, progress is more mixed.

School details

Unique reference number	136681
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10058478

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	1076
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Kate Townsend
Principal	Simon French
Telephone number	01782882100
Website	http://www.thediscoveryacademy.co.uk/
Email address	academy@thediscoveryacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 October 2016

Information about this school

- Discovery Academy is larger than the average secondary school.
- It is part of the Alpha Academies Trust. According to its scheme of delegation, the board of trustees has responsibility for determining the mission, ethos and key strategic priorities for the trust. The school's LGB has responsibility for day-to-day matters, including monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, attendance, behaviour and safety.
- Most pupils attending the school are White British, with a much-lower-than-average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly average, although the proportion with education, health and care plans is well above average.
- The school currently has 17 children looked after on its roll.

- The school places some pupils who require additional support at one of nine alternative providers. These are Sporting Stars, Phoenix, Reach, Unity, Peak, Merit, Stoke-on-Trent College, Intuition and Serenity Farm. In total, at the time of inspection, 17 pupils attended one of these providers. Most of these pupils attend their alternative provider full time, but some attend for one or two days a week, spending the remainder of the week in the school. At the time of inspection, 17 pupils across Years 9, 10 and 11 attended AP for part or all of the week.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons, and some of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to many pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, the school. They observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors visited an assembly.
- Meetings were held with the principal, the chief executive officer of the Alpha Academies Trust, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and four governors, including the chair of the LGB.
- The lead inspector met with and spoke over the telephone with two representatives of the LA.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised, including information relating to governance, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors closely scrutinised documents relating to pupils attending alternative provision and those removed from the school roll in Year 11.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views, by considering the 26 responses to Parent View, including 16 free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered 141 responses from staff and 134 responses from pupils to their respective inspection questionnaires.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Graeme Rudland	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Epton	Ofsted Inspector
Antony Edkins	Ofsted Inspector
Lynda Mitchell	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Mosley	Her Majesty's 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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