

Inspection of an outstanding school: Alsager School

Hassall Road, Alsager, Stoke-on-Trent, Cheshire ST7 2HR

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 September 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and students enjoy coming to Alsager School. They feel safe in school. Pupils and students are confident that staff will listen to them if they want to share any worries or concerns.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, told inspectors that staff will sort out any bullying concerns quickly and effectively. However, a very small number of pupils do not share this view.

Students in the sixth form, and most pupils in Years 7 to 11, behave very well in lessons. They said that they can get on with their learning and that teachers deal with any rare incidents of misbehaviour quickly.

Pupils and students enjoy a range of clubs and activities, such as sports and drama clubs. They speak passionately about a well-attended 'rainbow club' that provides a voice for the school's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Pupils also enjoy competing in sports events for points to win the college cup.

Staff have high expectations of what pupils and students can achieve across the school. However, the curriculum in key stage 3 in some creative subjects lacks sufficient depth. This hinders pupils from developing a detailed knowledge of these subject areas.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have ensured that pupils benefit from an appropriately broad and suitably ambitious curriculum at key stages 4 and 5. For example, leaders have added subjects such as criminology and sports coaching to meet students' needs and interests in the sixth form. Leaders have also increased the breadth and depth of the key stage 3 curriculum. For example, more pupils in Year 9 now study history, geography and a

modern foreign language than before. However, some younger pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not benefit fully from a suitably deep and rich curriculum in a small number of creative subjects. For example, in art and design, pupils do not learn in depth about a range of art from before 1900.

Subject leaders have created detailed curriculum plans across a range of subjects. These plans identify the most important knowledge that pupils and students need to learn, and when. This helps pupils and students to build on what they already know. For example, in modern foreign languages, pupils and students develop their knowledge of grammar well as they move through the school.

Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subjects that they teach. They benefit from effective subject-specific training. This training helps them to deliver the intended curriculum well. In the vast majority of lessons, pupils are free to learn without distractions. Teachers deal with any low-level disruption quickly and effectively.

Teachers use daily checks in lessons to identify pupils' and students' misconceptions from the taught curriculum. Teachers use this information effectively to help pupils and students to overcome their misunderstandings. However, in some subjects, assessments in key stage 3 do not help teachers to identify what pupils remember from the taught curriculum. Nor does the assessment information enable teachers to identify the missing building blocks in pupils' learning.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has effective systems in place to identify the needs of pupils and students with SEND. The SENCo provides staff with detailed information about how to support these pupils well. Well-trained teaching assistants carefully help pupils with SEND to learn important concepts.

Pupils and students achieve well across the curriculum. Almost all pupils progress to further education, employment or training. Younger pupils have access to regular reading lessons to develop their vocabulary and confidence. Those pupils who need additional help with reading receive appropriate support to develop their phonics knowledge.

Leaders provide pupils, including students in the sixth form, with several opportunities to become well-rounded citizens. For instance, pupils and students value learning about respect for diversity, including race, gender and sexuality, through the 'SPIRIT' curriculum. They also receive a range of appropriate guidance to prepare them well for the next stage of education, employment or training.

Governors and trustees know the school well. For example, members of the governing body have provided robust challenge and support around the breadth and depth of the key stage 3 curriculum. Governors and leaders value the staff's well-being. Staff appreciate leaders' strong regard for their workload.

Following discussions with leaders, inspectors decided that music and design and technology may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive appropriate safeguarding training, including in relation to peer-on-peer sexual abuse and harassment. They know what to do if they have concerns about a student or pupil. Where necessary, leaders refer concerns to external agencies without delay. Pupils and students develop a strong understanding of risk. For example, pupils in Years 7 and 10 learn about consent and healthy relationships. Pupils and students learn how to stay safe online.

During the inspection, leaders ensured that more appropriate systems were put in place to ensure stronger safeguarding arrangements at lunchtimes.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects in key stage 3, pupils do not gain knowledge in sufficient depth. This means that some pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND, do not fully benefit from the opportunity to develop the rich cultural capital they need for later life. Leaders should ensure that they continue their work to review the key stage 3 curriculum to ensure that all pupils experience an appropriately rich and deep curriculum across a broad range of subjects in key stage 3.
- Some assessments at key stage 3 do not help teachers to identify precisely what pupils remember from the taught curriculum over time. As a result, information from these assessments does not help teachers to pinpoint the missing building blocks in pupils' learning. Leaders should design assessments at key stage 3 that provide teachers with useful information about what pupils know and remember in the long term.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in February 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	140108
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10199522
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,596
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	319
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mr Allan Ward
Headteacher	Mrs Andrea O'Neill
Website	www.alsagerschool.org
Date of previous inspection	2 and 3 February 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors, vice-chair of governors and headteacher have been appointed. The previous headteacher remains at the school as executive headteacher.
- A very small number of pupils attend part-time alternative provision at The Lodge at Sandbach School.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- The lead inspector met with representatives of those responsible for governance. Inspectors met with the executive headteacher and the headteacher. The lead inspector also met virtually with representatives of Cheshire East local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, modern foreign languages, history, and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, and visited a sample of lessons. Inspectors met with teachers and spoke with pupils about their learning. Inspectors also scrutinised samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of curriculum plans and pupils' work in some other subjects. Inspectors spoke with leaders and teachers in some of these subjects.
- Inspectors talked with pupils and students about their experiences of school life. Inspectors also asked pupils and students how they have been taught to keep themselves safe, and what to do if they have concerns.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation on safeguarding, including the school's single central record. Inspectors also scrutinised leaders' behaviour and bullying logs.
- Inspectors considered 174 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 174 free-text comments, and 261 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire, and 95 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Linda Emmett, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Roberts

Ofsted Inspector

Timothy Gartside

Ofsted Inspector

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 <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

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 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021