

Airedale Academy

Crewe Road, Airedale, Castleford, West Yorkshire WF10 3JU

Inspection dates

26–27 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have created a positive climate for learning underpinned by high levels of expectation in all areas of the school.
- Since her appointment in September 2016, the principal and her senior team have taken decisive action to improve inherent weaknesses which have hindered the progress of pupils in the past, such as the school's previous examination entry policies and the nature of the curriculum being offered.
- Teaching is effective. The majority of pupils make good and improving progress from low starting points when they enter the school. Occasionally, teachers do not use the information they have about pupils' current abilities to plan activities that help pupils to make consistently good progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good and improving progress in relation to their peers and the differences in their performance and other pupils are reducing.
- Leaders are using pupil premium funding effectively to improve the attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils. However, attendance rates overall, although improving, remain below average.
- Pupils behave well. Strong relationships between staff and pupils are based on mutual trust and respect, which results in pupils' positive attitude to learning.
- Pupils are safe and feel safe because of effective safeguarding arrangements and a comprehensive student well-being curriculum.
- Leaders provide comprehensive and effective advice, guidance and support to help pupils pursue courses that are well matched to their aptitudes and aspirations.
- The provision for post-16 students is good. Most students make good progress. The school has strong links with local employers and provides wide-ranging work experiences linked to students' learning.
- Although senior leaders are taking effective steps to improve the quality and consistency of middle leadership, this remains an area for further development.
- Governors know the school well and are beginning to work with the academy trust to hold leaders to account more effectively. This remains an area for further development, along with the need to fill the existing vacancies on the academy council.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the progress and attainment of all groups of pupils by taking steps to embed the school's system for tracking pupils' progress and attainment and ensuring that the system is understood and used consistently by all teachers in the school.
- Continue to improve pupils' attendance to achieve levels of attendance in line with those of other schools nationally by embedding the systems for tracking, targeting and supporting those vulnerable pupils at risk of not attending school regularly.
- Develop greater consistency in the quality and effectiveness of middle leadership by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders continue to model the approaches needed and then to support middle leaders in their development of these approaches
 - reviewing the meeting schedules to ensure that there are regular opportunities for subject leaders to meet together to share good practice.
- Increase the effectiveness of the governing body by:
 - recruiting governors with appropriate skills and experience to provide the full complement of governors required by the trust
 - reviewing the ways that the academy council and trust board work together, including the frequency of their meetings.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since taking up post in September 2016, the principal has clearly identified the areas needing improvement and has implemented timely and effective measures to address them. Notably, she reviewed the curriculum and has now ensured that it is broad and balanced, and meets the needs, aptitudes and aspirations of her pupils.
- The principal and her senior leaders have established a strong ethos characterised by high levels of support coupled with equally high levels of challenge and expectation. An atmosphere of high expectations and care permeates through all areas of the school. Pupils and staff welcome, and respect highly, the improvements made.
- Senior leaders have established comprehensive reviews of departments as part of their quality assurance procedures. They have sound judgement in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and take effective action to improve weaker practice where required. Consequently, the quality of teaching is typically good.
- Senior leaders' work with middle leaders has resulted in a sharper focus on effective planning, high levels of expectation for pupils and staff and a relentless focus on improving standards. Middle leaders are now taking more of a lead in evaluating their own effectiveness and that of their departments. However, this is not yet consistent across all departments. For example, some middle leaders are not ensuring that teachers use pupil assessment systems consistently to plan activities that meet pupils' varying needs and abilities.
- Comprehensive systems for the monitoring and tracking of pupils' behaviour and innovative approaches to supporting those pupils at risk of exclusion have resulted in all pupils being included in learning. Notably, the student support centre (POD4U), and Step Out and Cool Off provisions support pupils, rather than punishing them. Staff in these units have the same high expectations that pupils will continue with work that they would have in normal lessons. Incidents of poor behaviour have fallen sharply and fixed-term exclusions are reducing as a result of this support.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is well ordered and purposeful with positive attitudes to learning. This positive behaviour is a result of leaders insisting that staff consistently apply the behaviour policy. Swift and effective actions by the principal have secured a number of quick wins. These include banning the use of mobile phones on site and ensuring that the uniform is worn correctly, the quality of which is now exemplary. Pupils and staff greatly appreciate the positive impact of the behaviour policy on improving school life.
- The school's system for tracking pupils' progress and attainment in Years 7 and 8 is becoming embedded. Leaders are working to ensure that this system is understood and used consistently by all teachers in the school. Leaders work with teachers to set challenging targets for pupils and to make sure that their teaching makes the high demands necessary for pupils to make good progress.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to target the needs of disadvantaged pupils, particularly regarding their attendance. Their attendance rates this year and towards the end of last year have improved significantly. Leaders also make effective use of

Year 7 catch-up funding through a variety of approaches, including a nurture programme, reading interventions (including the Bookbuzz scheme), and smaller classes in mathematics. These have resulted in improved reading ages and attainment in mathematics for those pupils identified as needing this extra support.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make generally good progress in their learning as a result of the support and guidance provided to them. However, governors do not evaluate the impact of the additional funding provided for these pupils rigorously enough.
- Leaders have developed a comprehensive student well-being curriculum which delivers high-quality learning in personal, social, health and religious education as well as pupils' preparation for life in modern Britain. It weaves spiritual, moral and cultural education throughout its programme and includes input from external speakers and a programme of assemblies. This contributes to the quality of the curriculum, which is broad and balanced and offers a wide range of appropriate courses for study in key stage 4.

Governance of the school

- Governors visit their attached areas regularly and gather valuable information regarding their development but do not always use the information effectively. For example, governors visited the special educational needs and/or disabilities department when they gathered information but did not hold leaders to account for the progress of those pupils.
- The capacity of the academy council to challenge leaders on the impact of their work is currently limited due to a significant number of vacancies and the infrequency of meetings between the council and the trust board. Governors are inclined to rely too much on leaders' evaluations and the views of the trust rather than challenging leaders directly.
- Governors make appropriate decisions based on teachers' performance. The trust's risk and audit committee, of which the chair of the governing body is a member, undertakes more detailed scrutiny of the school's performance. It is too early in its development to evaluate its effectiveness.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders make all required checks to make sure that adults are suitable to work with young people. They keep an accurate record of these checks, which staff diligently maintain.
- The designated safeguarding lead has a strong grasp of safeguarding issues and she has ensured that this is shared and understood by all. All staff have received the required training and a culture of safeguarding is evident throughout the school. Pupils know how to stay safe on the internet. The pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they all had more than one member of staff whom they would confide in if they had any concerns. The pupils valued and understood the messages from the comprehensive student well-being curriculum. This has resulted in all pupils who made their views known to inspectors saying that they are safe and feel safe at the school.

- Staff and pupils understand how to identify those at risk and how to report concerns. Leaders swiftly and effectively follow up any concerns raised and monitor those at risk of harm.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders have established consistent routines and expectations in all lessons across the curriculum, and these are positively supporting pupils' learning and progress. Leaders know where the strengths and weaknesses are in their departments and are beginning to work effectively with their teachers to improve pupils' progress through coaching them and modelling good practice.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and know their pupils well. They have high levels of expectation, and through questioning and guidance support pupils' development, in and out of lessons. This results in relationships of an extremely high quality. These relationships enable teachers to effectively question and challenge their pupils in order to move their learning forward.
- Teachers have comprehensive information about the previous attainment of their pupils and use it to help them plan effectively. This includes individual tasks which extend and develop pupils' learning. For example, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, the teacher used personalised feedback sheets to provide bespoke extension questions which extended pupils' learning. As a result, groups of pupils, including the least able, middle-ability, higher ability and disadvantaged pupils, make good progress.
- Teachers' high expectations ensure that pupils successfully learn at the highest levels. For example, in an observed science lesson, a pupil in Year 9 was able to produce a balanced nuclear equation and, in a biology lesson, pupils were able to accurately describe the workings of the human heart; in both these cases, this was demonstrating progress from their starting points.
- In a history lesson, the teacher effectively used a variety of resources to challenge and support Year 8 pupils' learning. Pupils used copies of original documents and textbooks confidently. The teacher increased pupils' confidence further by referring to them as 'historians'. As a result, pupils were proud of their achievements and able to speak with confidence about the work they were doing.
- Leaders are ensuring greater consistency in the thorough planning of learning. For example, the new head of the French department has produced comprehensive schemes of work and is supporting her team to plan creative lessons. This has resulted in pupils' progress and attainment increasing and attitudes to learning in this subject becoming stronger.
- Teachers in most subjects use highly effective questioning techniques in order to check on pupils' learning. They use pupils' answers well to challenge them to achieve a greater depth of understanding.
- Teachers monitor pupils' work in the classroom effectively and usually provide extra challenge to move pupils' learning forward. Pupils' work from this academic year and the last, across a range of subjects, year groups and ability groups, indicates that they make good progress over time. Occasionally, in some lessons, teaching lacks pace and challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.

- Pupils enjoy their learning. Those spoken with described the effective one-to-one learning conversations they had with their teacher and how this resulted in them making good progress particularly, but not exclusively, in the sixth form.
- There are some inconsistencies in teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation of their work. Sometimes the work in books shows a lack of pride in their work. Although the teaching of literacy across the curriculum is developing, there is not yet a consistent approach to the teaching of spelling. This results in spelling inaccuracies not being corrected in some subjects, which can undermine the importance of spelling in pupils' communication of their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and have pride in their school. They have a very positive attitude to their learning.
- The new principal took swift and effective action to improve behaviour and introduced a number of innovative measures to support pupils at risk of exclusion. Three separate provisions, Cool Off, Step Out and POD4U, are highly valued by pupils and staff and have contributed to a reduction in exclusions from school compared with the same period last year. Crucially, staff working in the various on-site behaviour units, who support pupils finding compliance with the expectations of the school difficult, insist that pupils complete the same work that is being done by their classmates during their absence from mainstream lessons. This has contributed to the positive attitudes to learning that pervade the school.
- The school has recently begun working with the charity Barnardo's to teach its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender awareness programme. This is to supplement the comprehensive student well-being curriculum which is valued by pupils and staff and taught in form time and through assemblies. Pupils have a good knowledge of the rights of those with protected characteristics and vulnerability to radicalisation, and articulate their understanding clearly. Pupils of all ages know how to stay safe online and are able to talk about this with confidence. This includes students in the sixth form. Pupils and students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- A small number of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion attend the UCAN centre in Pontefract and one pupil attends Wakefield College for part of their studies. The quality of this provision is regularly monitored by leaders and they ensure that high expectations are made of these pupils, in keeping with the ethos of the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The principal introduced a new behaviour policy shortly after her arrival. This has had a significant impact on reducing incidents of poor behaviour. Staff have become more effective and confident in dealing with any poor behaviour that arises. Pupils' behaviour around the school at change of lessons, breaktime, lunchtime and upon entering and leaving the site is exemplary.

- Pupils from all year groups who spoke to inspectors have extremely high levels of confidence in staff at all levels of the school to deal with any incidents of poor behaviour, including bullying of any nature. Poor behaviour does not impact on pupils' learning because teachers use the behaviour system consistently.
- Leaders have employed a number of innovative approaches to improve levels of attendance, which is beginning to have a positive impact. These effective strategies are spearheaded by a team of senior leaders. Mentors work with poorly attending pupils and their families. Leaders then scrutinise pupils' attendance data to identify those with particular patterns of absence whom they then target for support. The effect of these measures is embryonic, but is demonstrated in the increase in attendance compared with the same period last year, and the significant improvements since their implementation in the summer term.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils with low- and middle-levels of attainment upon entry to the school made good progress in 2016, notably in English, the English Baccalaureate and science, and this was significantly above the national average.
- Attainment in the vast majority of subjects showed strong improvement in 2017. There is a rising profile of attainment in the vast majority of subjects. The variance between the performance of pupils of differing abilities from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers reduced. In art, business studies, drama and resistant materials, for example, the gaps in attainment reduced for pupils from their various starting points.
- A new system for tracking pupils' progress for Years 7 and 8 was implemented from September 2017. It is too early for its effectiveness to be evaluated. The system employed for tracking pupils' progress for Years 9 to 11 is effective. It provides rich data which teachers use effectively to plan appropriate lessons with suitable levels of challenge for pupils of all abilities. This results in pupils making good progress from their different starting points. The school works in partnership with a number of other schools to ensure that its assessments of pupils' work are accurate.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and examined samples of work from the previous academic year. Their findings confirm that the majority of pupils make good progress over time in all year groups, and particularly in English, mathematics, science, history and geography.
- The school has deployed its pupil premium funding effectively. This has contributed to the strong and improving progress of disadvantaged pupils and is significant as this cohort constitutes nearly half of the school population. Targeted programmes for the most vulnerable pupils ensure access to an appropriate and challenging curriculum at all times, including those receiving extra support for their behaviour and who are at risk of exclusion. Relentless support and challenge for this group of pupils are also resulting in their improved attendance and engagement with school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The provision in the small sixth form has a curriculum which focuses on the needs of students with particular career ambitions in the performing arts, business, and health and social care. School leaders developed the sixth form to provide pathways of learning for these students who otherwise were at risk of not going on to education, employment or training. All students follow vocational courses leading to assessment at levels equivalent to A level.
- The latest published data indicates that students make at least as much progress as their peers do nationally, on average for all groups, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Attainment at the end of the 2017 academic year was above the national average for all groups, including those students from a disadvantaged background. Outcomes in all subjects have been consistently strong over time.
- Retention rates from the beginning of Year 12 to the end of Year 13 for most groups are above the average nationally and are rising year on year. This is slightly lower for those students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Retention rates between Years 12 and 13 are slightly below average. Detailed case studies explain that the reasons for students leaving were not related to the quality of work done by the school.
- The latest destination data presents a strong picture, with all students going on to appropriate education, employment or training. This comprises half of the cohort going on to study at higher education institutions, nearly a quarter going on to theatre school, a fifth into employment, and the remaining students taking up apprenticeships.
- Students' attitudes in the sixth form are extremely positive and students are committed to their studies. Learning in lessons is calm and purposeful. However, students' attendance rates have declined over the previous two academic years. Leaders are aware of this and are working with staff and students to improve matters.
- Study programmes comply with the Department for Education's requirements, especially in respect of the provision of information, advice and guidance. High-quality work experience placements, brokered by the school's careers adviser, are tailored to the courses that the students study. The school's careers adviser supports students well in sourcing and applying for the next phase of their lives.
- Strong relationships with tutors underpin students' personal development and employability, through regular tutor-group and one-to-one sessions. In addition, students follow a compulsory progression programme working with Leeds Beckett University. Students who made their views known to the inspectors said that they are safe, feel safe and have good access to sources of advice and guidance in the school.
- Students who retook their English and mathematics GCSEs in the sixth form have achieved well for the past two years. The proportions achieving at least a grade C or a grade 4 were above average.
- Lessons proceed with purpose and focus and target grades are ambitious. Students are well supported by subject staff to help them attain their targets. Lessons are characterised by teachers' high levels of expectation and challenge, personalised to the needs of the students. Consequently, students respond with enthusiasm and commitment. For example, in a health and social care lesson, students worked on personal statements in preparation for their work experience placements. The teacher

worked alongside her students to help them to improve and focus their work to achieve work of a high standard. Occasionally in lessons, some students are too reliant on the teacher for guidance and feedback rather than developing more independent ways of working.

School details

Unique reference number	136613
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	10036528

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	913
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	53
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mike Dixon
Principal	Elizabeth Fairhurst
Telephone number	01977 664555
Website	www.airedaleacademy.com
Email address	info@airedaleacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	12–13 November 2013

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.
- Airedale Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The number of pupils has increased since the last inspection.
- A small number of pupils attend the UCAN centre in Carlton, Pontefract, and a smaller number attend Wakefield College for part of their studies.

- Around half of the pupils are known to be entitled to free school meals. This is well above average.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages is well below that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who have been identified by the school as requiring additional support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan to support their special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment.
- The school is part of the Northern Ambition Academies Trust with three local primary schools: Airedale Infant School, Airedale Junior School and Oyster Park Primary Academy.
- The school is a named partner within the teaching school alliance based at Outwood Grange Academy.
- A new principal has been appointed since the last inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited parts of 35 lessons across most subject areas. Many of these took place with senior leaders. During visits to lessons, inspectors looked in pupils' workbooks and questioned pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors discussed with pupils what it is like to be a young person at the school in groups, formally and individually, during the course of the inspection. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including between lessons, at breaktime and lunchtime, and upon entry to and when leaving the site.
- Discussions took place with the principal, other senior leaders, most subject leaders, and newly and recently qualified teachers. Discussions also took place with a trustee, the chair of the governing body and the chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors took into account 32 responses to the parent online survey, Parent View, 76 responses to the staff survey and 36 responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors examined documents, including school development plans, minutes of governing body meetings and information about pupils' achievement.
- Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Mike Tull, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Michael Cook	Ofsted Inspector
James Kilner	Ofsted Inspector
Belita Scott	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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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