

Inspection of Atherton High School

Hamilton Street, Atherton, Greater Manchester M46 0AY

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 October 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils said that Atherton High School is a community with a caring, family ethos. Pupils appreciate the strong relationships that they forge with staff. Pupils feel valued as individuals. They are happy. Pupils enjoy coming to school to learn, and they said that they feel safe.

Pupils respect each other's differences. Pupils told inspectors that incidents of bullying are rare. They said that if bullying does happen, teachers and other adults respond quickly to resolve any issues.

Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Most pupils behave well in lessons. When moving around the school, pupils are courteous and act sensibly.

Pupils benefit from studying a wide range of subjects. Teachers expect pupils to achieve highly. However, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should during their time in school. This is because, in some subjects, teachers do not check that pupils understand the work well enough.

Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to widen their horizons and deepen their understanding of the world. Pupils enjoy taking part in a variety of activities, such as computer club, multi-sports, first aid and meditation clubs. Pupils also enjoy a wide range of interesting enrichment events, such as industry days.

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

Leaders, trustees and governors have a clear vision for the school, and they enact it well. They have successfully made many improvements since the previous inspection, especially in relation to pupils' behaviour. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school. Leaders and trustees work very effectively with parents. A typical comment received from a parent was that her child 'has never been happier'.

Over time, pupils have not been sufficiently well prepared for the next stage of their education or training. To address this, leaders have increased the ambitiousness of the curriculum and developed detailed and appropriate curriculum plans. These plans ensure that the curriculum is ambitious for everyone, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have thought carefully about the precise knowledge that pupils should learn and in what order. Teachers are now using curriculum plans well to design learning activities that enable pupils to build on what they already know and can do. However, it is too early to see the full impact of this positive change on pupils' achievement.

Pupils revisit their learning regularly. However, in a small number of subjects, teachers do not use assessment effectively enough to identify misconceptions. Some teachers do not know when pupils have missing knowledge or where they have

forgotten key learning. As a result, some pupils do not progress through the curriculum as well as they should.

Teachers identify the needs of pupils with SEND effectively. They are equally adept at adapting how they deliver curriculum plans so that these pupils can learn the same ambitious curriculum as others in the school. However, like other pupils in the school, some pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they should. This is because gaps in their knowledge are not picked up well enough when teachers check their learning.

Leaders have a clear focus on developing pupils' reading and vocabulary knowledge. Pupils read regularly and fluently. Teachers support pupils to develop subject-specific vocabulary.

Staff are consistent in their management of pupils' behaviour. Pupils said that staff reward them for the effort that they put into their schoolwork. Pupils value this. In most lessons, pupils can learn without disruption. They show positive attitudes to their learning.

Pupils' attendance has improved over time. However, a small number of disadvantaged pupils miss out on their learning because they do not attend school regularly enough. That said, leaders are well on the way to improving pupils' attendance further, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders have put in place a very strong programme to support pupils' wider personal development. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. They are confident in discussing issues relating to sex education. Teachers also prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain effectively. Pupils are tolerant of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Pupils benefit from a well-designed careers programme. A high proportion of pupils continue into further education and training, including pupils with SEND.

Trustees and governors are continually improving the quality of education for all pupils. They are holding leaders successfully to account for the quality of the curriculum and how well it meets pupils' learning needs. Staff enjoy working in the school. Teachers said that leaders consider their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. They ensure that teachers receive appropriate training, including around peer-on-peer abuse. Leaders and teachers are vigilant. They are alert to pupils' concerns. Staff know how to spot the signs of potential abuse.

Leaders and staff work well with other agencies to provide timely support to pupils and their families.

Pupils are clear about who they can go to should they need help. They feel staff are approachable and they are confident in sharing concerns. Due to a strong personal development curriculum, pupils know how to keep safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not know when pupils have missing knowledge or where they have forgotten key learning. Neither do some teachers address pupils' misconceptions quickly enough. As a result, pupils, including some pupils with SEND, do not progress through the curriculum as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that all teachers check pupils' understanding to inform necessary adaptations to curriculum plans. They should ensure that teachers use appropriate strategies to identify and address pupils' misunderstandings.
- Some disadvantaged pupils miss a greater proportion of lessons than other pupils due to their rates of absence. This prevents them from achieving as highly as they could. Leaders should continue to improve the rates of attendance of a small number of disadvantaged pupils.

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	138233
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10200805
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	486
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ian Brown
Headteacher	Ben Layzell
Website	www.athertonhigh.com
Dates of previous inspection	7 and 8 February 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school became part of Education Partnership Trust in April 2020.
- A new chair of the governing body was appointed in July 2020.
- A new headteacher was appointed in June 2021.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 11 receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative education at one registered provider.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- Inspectors held meetings with the trust chief executive, director of education, chair of governors, headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, staff and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of school, and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans. They also looked at minutes of governing body meetings and records of pupils' behaviour.
- An inspector looked at safeguarding policies and reviewed leaders' record of checks on the suitability of staff and governors.
- Inspectors considered the staff's and pupils' responses to Ofsted's online staff's and pupils' surveys. Inspectors also considered the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including the free-text responses.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in science, history, art and design, and modern foreign languages. They visited a sample of lessons in these subjects, met with subject leaders, reviewed pupils' work and had discussions with teachers and pupils. In addition, an inspector reviewed curriculum planning in a range of other subjects, including geography, English and drama.

Inspection team

David Hampson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn Platt	Ofsted Inspector
Jon Ashley	Ofsted Inspector

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