

Atherton Community School

Hamilton Street, Atherton, Manchester, M46 0AY

Inspection dates

4–5 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection: This inspection:	Not previously inspected	2
	Good		
Achievement of pupils	Good	2	
Quality of teaching	Good	2	
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2	
Leadership and management	Good	2	

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students learn well in English, mathematics and other subjects. Teaching over time is rarely less than good and some is outstanding.
- Students behave well around the school and in lessons and are eager to learn. Relationships in the school are positive.
- Innovative aspects to the curriculum lead to rapid development of students' personal and learning skills.
- Attendance is above average for Years 7 and 8 and is rising for all years.
- Senior leaders provide highly effective leadership. As a result, teaching and students' achievement are improving.
- Students are known and valued as individuals.
- Parents have confidence in the school.
- Governors provide good support and challenge to senior leaders and are becoming increasingly effective.
- The school's sponsoring trust is active in shaping the work of the school. This is underpinned by a strong Christian ethos, which is fully inclusive.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' learning are developed well. This links to the school's positive ethos.
- The sixth form provides a good standard of education.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Too little teaching over time is outstanding.
- The standard of presentation of students' work is not always high enough.
- Some learning tasks and activities do not sufficiently challenge students.
- While increasing, attendance rates in the sixth form is too low.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons taught by nine teachers and made short visits to 'project-based learning' and morning registration time activities. They examined a sample of students' work and students' exercise books in lessons.
- The conduct of students was observed at different times throughout the school day.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders and teachers. They met formally with groups of students and talked informally with others in lessons and around the school.
- Documents were examined including the school's self-evaluation information, development plan, safeguarding records, minutes of governing body meetings and data relating to students' achievement, attendance and behaviour.
- Meetings were held with governors and a phone call was made to a representative of the school's sponsoring trust.
- Inspectors reviewed 39 responses to Parent View, which is Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. A letter from a parent was considered. Questionnaire returns from 26 members of staff were examined.

Inspection team

David Selby, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jacqueline Rothery

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This free school opened in September 2012 and has not been previously inspected.
- The sixth form started in September 2013.
- This school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school, although it is growing rapidly. Currently 136 students are on roll with 107 in Years 7 and 8, and 29 in Year 12.
- The school moved into a newly refurbished school building in September 2013 after operating from a temporary site in Atherton Town Hall for one year.
- The Executive Principal also has responsibility for the start-up of another local free school within the same family of schools.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium¹ is well above the national average.
- The proportion of students that the school has identified as disabled or as having special educational needs and requiring support through school action matches the national average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- No student is educated off-site nor attends alternative provision.
- There are no public examination results by which to measure the school's performance against the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school is part of the Chapel St Community Schools Trust family of schools. Chapel St is a Christian charity.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers build on the increasingly good practice in the school so that there is more outstanding teaching and learning.
- Ensure that the presentation of students' work is always of a consistently high standard.
- Ensure that learning tasks and activities provide sufficient challenge to all students and particularly to the most able.

¹ The pupil premium is specific, additional funding provided to support the education of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, pupils who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years and children who have been looked after continuously for a period of 6 months.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment on entry to the school has been different for its first two years. It was well below the national average in 2012 and broadly average in 2013. Evidence from the inspection and the school's own data show that students achieve well in English and mathematics whatever their starting points.
- Inspectors saw students making good progress in almost all lessons observed. Very rapid progress was seen in some lessons, for example, in Year 7's 'project-based learning'. 'Project-based learning' is a school initiative designed to develop students' learning skills. In the session observed, students' very good collaborative learning skills led to deepening understanding of friendship.
- Teachers' expectations of students' learning in lessons are generally high. This supports good progress. However, consistently high standards of presentation are not always demanded. Students' speaking and listening skills are well developed. Their confident use of these skills helps their learning in different subjects.
- There has been less focus on the use of mathematics in other subjects. However, teachers give students opportunities to use their mathematical skills in science and geography where this is relevant.
- No differences were observed between the progress made by students supported by the pupil premium and others. While the school's own detailed records show that individual students' rates of progress vary, they confirm that the overall progress of these groups is closely matched.
- Students with special educational needs achieve at least as well as other students in English and science. School records indicate that this is not the case in mathematics although effective action is being taken to reduce this gap. The school's twice-weekly lessons to develop students' personal and learning attributes lead to particularly rapid progress for students with special educational needs.
- Additional funding through the Year 7 catch-up premium and the pupil premium is used to develop students' literacy skills by providing extra lessons and on other strategies, such as providing access to e-books. This work is closely targeted and leads to rapid progress in reading for students with lower starting points.
- While the most able pupils generally make good progress, the faster progress of other students means that gaps in achievement are closing.
- The sixth form has only recently been established; therefore students have not yet had the results of any external examinations. However, the school's tracking is linked to targets for students' achievement set in comparison to similar students across the country. This system is used to check rigorously how well students are doing. It indicates that most students are exceeding their demanding targets. When this is not the case, individual plans are put in place to ensure that student's rates of progress increase.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students' good achievement results from effective teaching over time. Inspectors saw teaching and learning which was usually good and some that was outstanding. Very little was seen to be less effective and no inadequate teaching and learning were observed.
- The school's own evaluation of teaching identifies more less-effective teaching than inspection evidence indicates. Inspection evidence indicates that the quality of teaching is improving.
- Lessons typically involve a wide range of resources and approaches. Students are encouraged to be creative and adopt an enquiring approach to their learning, they are often enthusiastic learners.
- Relationships between students and with their teachers are positive. When these characteristics

are fully in place, very rapid progress follows. This was seen in a Year 7 art lesson where students were engrossed in their work and developed their learning through thorough and supportive assessment of each other's work.

- While learning in most lessons is good, it sometimes slows and students became a little restless when they were not sufficiently challenged, for example, when they had to wait until others completed a task. Occasionally, tasks set were not fully appropriate for the age or ability of the students. This limited progress, particularly for the most able.
- Inspectors saw examples of very effective marking, where students were expected to respond to detailed comments on their work. Marking in some books seen did not support students' learning equally well because comments were briefer, less focussed on the most important points, or not followed up by students.
- Most of the classes in the sixth form are smaller than in many other schools. This does not hinder learning as teachers closely match the work to individual students and provide very good support for their learning. While many opportunities are taken to enhance sixth form students' learning by considering real-life scenarios and using partners outside the school, links between subjects taken by the same students could sometimes be improved.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students conduct themselves very well in lessons and around the school and show a pride in and a respect for their school. They are very welcoming and courteous to visitors.
- Relationships between everyone in the school are shaped by its very strong positive ethos. Students understand this and talk of the school as a 'family'.
- Effective approaches to learning are reinforced in 'project-based learning' lessons. Students are keen to 'graduate' at the end of each school year. This requires them to meet criteria for academic success, attendance, community involvement and personal development. The school council has discussed these criteria. Students who 'graduate' are recognised and rewarded.
- Almost all students who talked with inspectors said there is no bullying in the school. A very small number said they felt there was some bullying but were quick to explain it had been responded to by teachers. On further investigation, a few boys had used homophobic language. This poor behaviour had been identified, and quickly and appropriately dealt with by senior leaders. No parent who responded to Parent View disagreed that the school deals effectively with bullying.
- The attendance of students in Years 7 and 8 is above average and is improving. Punctuality to school and to lessons is very good. The attendance of any students who are regularly absent is carefully monitored and better attendance encouraged.
- Sixth form students show maturity towards their learning. Their confidence and commitment as learners has grown rapidly throughout their time in the school. The attendance of sixth form students is lower than in the main school. Senior leaders are aware of the factors that contribute to this and are working effectively with students to improve their attendance. Sixth form attendance is rising.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- No incidents that indicate students were unsafe were seen in lessons or around the school. Appropriate risk assessments are in place. Students are taught about ways to keep themselves safe when using the internet and mobile phones, to be healthy and to understand the risks they may face.
- Students say that they feel safe in school. All parents who responded to the online survey agreed and also confirmed that they felt that their child was well looked after at the school.
- The arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.

The leadership and management are good

- The work of the school is firmly underpinned by the ethos of the Chapel St of 'Grace, Love and Fellowship'. This is expressed by governors and senior leaders. It gives the school its determination to serve the local community and welcome people of all faiths and none.
 - The Executive Principal and her small senior leadership team are highly effective. They have rapidly established a successful school and supported its further growth and development on its new site this school year. The leadership of teaching and learning has led to improvement. Appropriate plans have been made to ensure that the Executive Principal's additional responsibilities outside Atherton Community School do not slow its development.
 - Senior leaders' evaluation of the school is honest and accurate. They build on the school's many strengths and are prepared to tackle robustly any weaknesses. Performance management systems are in place. If members of staff are not reaching the high standards required, senior leaders provide support and training. If this is not effective, senior leaders work with governors to take further action. This has led to recent changes in staffing. The head of mathematics recently joined the school and senior leaders are taking on temporary additional responsibilities to cover a vacant administrative post.
 - The number of middle leaders has increased as the school has grown. This is contributing to the capacity of the school to improve. Training is available to ensure middle leaders' effectiveness and further development continues.
 - The school is inclusive. School leaders ensure there is equality of opportunity as indicated by the inclusion of boys and girls in activities that are normally gender specific.
 - The school's curriculum meets the needs of students well. It covers the full range of National Curriculum subjects and religious education and is enhanced by project-based learning and activities to develop students' personal skills. Inspectors saw the principles behind the school's project-based learning in action in a tea party for older members of the community. This had been planned and prepared for by sixth-form students and also included a small number of boys and girls from Year 7 singing to the visitors.
 - The school's particular ethos also leads to very effective development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Students are clear about what is right or wrong and the responsibilities and opportunities of learning in a growing community. The school is increasingly linking to its wider community in aspects as diverse as its business links and commitment to charity work. A link with a school in Africa is in the early stages of being set up.
 - The school is committed to coaching. For example, this is provided by Chapel St as an important part of the professional development of senior leaders but is also reflected in the individual tutoring provided to students in the sixth form.
 - The very effective leadership of the sixth form provides an environment where students thrive. Systems to ensure that students are well supported in their next steps, whether in higher education or employment, are in place.
 - The parents who shared their opinions with inspectors were, almost without exception, highly satisfied with the school.
- The governance of the school:**
- Governors provide strong support and increasingly effective challenge to senior leaders. They are increasingly well informed about strengths and weaknesses in the school and its performance.
 - Senior leaders have worked with governors to promote more incisive questioning. This is helping governors to understand more about students' achievement. Governors are developing their knowledge of the quality of teaching in the school. For example, they undertake visits to classrooms accompanied by senior leaders.
 - Governors know about the school's use of the pupil premium but recognise that they need to become more aware of what difference this additional funding is making.
 - The present Chair of the Governing Body is the Chief Executive of Chapel St. He is serving as Chair of the Governing Body in an interim capacity. Appropriate arrangements have been made for the appointment and development of a local Chair of the Governing Body for the

next school year.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138233
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	426042

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	136
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	29
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Russell Rook
Principal	Elizabeth Haddock
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01942 885500
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	enquiries@atherton-cs.org

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