

Highfield Leadership Academy

Highfield Road, Blackpool, Lancashire FY4 3JZ

Inspection dates

11–12 December 2018

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| Overall effectiveness | Inadequate |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Inadequate |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Inadequate |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Inadequate |
| Outcomes for pupils | Inadequate |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Pupils make inadequate progress in many subjects. Leaders, including trustees and governors, have been unable to improve the school quickly enough. As a result, the quality of education falls far short of being acceptable.
- Leaders and trust representatives have an overgenerous view of the school's effectiveness.
- Arrangements to safeguard pupils are ineffective. Some pupils do not feel safe.
- Many pupils report that their teachers do not tackle bullying effectively. Some pupils report that they witness homophobic discrimination.
- The use of offensive language by pupils in the corridors is commonplace. Some pupils show a lack of respect for each other and staff.
- Pupils' behaviour disrupts learning. Disruption from some pupils means that many classrooms are disorderly. Some pupils ignore instructions from staff.
- Temporary staff do not receive adequate help to plan learning or manage pupils' behaviour effectively.
- Despite teachers' efforts, much time during learning is not used effectively. Many pupils do not focus well on their learning.
- Many teachers do not use assessment information effectively to plan learning.
- Some teachers have low expectations of pupils' behaviour. They do not use the school's systems effectively to challenge pupils' poor behaviour.
- Some pupils have gaps in their learning. They do not have sufficient knowledge to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Pupils' progress at key stage 4 is among the worst in the country. Pupils have underachieved significantly in most subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Provisional information for 2018 shows that the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and boys is exceptionally poor. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) also underachieve.
- Some pupils expressed concerns about the negative effect that leaders' recent changes to the curriculum will have on their choices when they leave the school.
- Although pupils' attendance has improved, almost one quarter of disadvantaged pupils continue to be absent from school regularly.
- Many pupils arrive at school late. Also, many pupils do not arrive punctually at their lessons.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and trust representatives have a strong sense of moral purpose. They have faced substantial obstacles and have worked tenaciously to overcome these.
- Many pupils at the school want to do well and they are polite and friendly.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve urgently the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders make sure that arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective in creating a culture in which pupils are safe and feel safe
 - leaders take effective steps to minimise discriminatory behaviour and bullying across the school
 - teachers apply behaviour systems consistently to challenge and eliminate the poor and disrespectful behaviour of some pupils
 - leaders at every level, including those responsible for governance, have an accurate view of the quality of education that the school provides
 - leaders' decisions about the curriculum have a positive impact on pupils' progress at key stage 4 and are communicated clearly to pupils, parents and carers
 - middle leaders provide temporary staff with effective support to create an orderly learning environment
 - middle leaders provide temporary staff with effective support to organise pupils' learning effectively and fill the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - leaders use additional funding effectively to make sure that disadvantaged pupils make at least the same progress as other pupils nationally.
- Improve immediately the provision for pupils' development and welfare by ensuring that:
 - pupils are confident that staff will listen to them and take their concerns seriously
 - pupils are confident that teachers will deal with incidents of bullying, including homophobic bullying, effectively
 - pupils are kind to each other and show respect and tolerance for their peers
 - pupils understand the negative effects of bullying and discriminatory behaviour.
- Rapidly improve pupils' behaviour by ensuring that:
 - pupils regulate their own behaviour around school without the need for high levels of staff supervision
 - pupils show respect for their teachers and follow instructions from staff
 - pupils refrain from swearing and using offensive language around school
 - disruption in class is eradicated and pupils focus well on their learning
 - the attendance of all pupils, and particularly of disadvantaged pupils, continues to

improve

- pupils consistently arrive at school and their lessons on time.
- Improve the quality of teaching, so that pupils make the progress that they should in different year groups and in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of pupils and insist on positive attitudes to learning
 - teaching is better planned to meet the needs of pupils, and particularly boys
 - teachers use assessment information to plan learning that challenges pupils, particularly those who are most able
 - teachers use information about what pupils know already to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - plans to support pupils with SEND take sufficient account of individual special needs and staff have high expectations of what pupils with SEND can achieve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Senior leaders are overly optimistic about the quality of education that pupils receive. It is leaders' view that they have made some improvements since the new school opened in April 2016. However, senior leaders underestimate many endemic weaknesses that are clearly apparent. For instance, leaders believe that pupils' behaviour is good. The judgement that they have made about this aspect of the school is inaccurate. It contradicts the evidence gathered on inspection, including the opinions of many pupils and staff who spoke with the inspection team.
- Leaders have secured improvements in the proportion of pupils excluded from the school. However, leaders' own behaviour information does not show that behaviour around the school is improving.
- There are 23 pupils deemed to be at risk of exclusion. Leaders have decided that these pupils require part-time timetables due to concerns with their behaviour. These pupils have access to an alternative curriculum for the time that they spend in school. This is largely having a positive effect on their attitudes to learning. However, although some of them are extremely vulnerable, many leave the school at lunchtime to return home unsupervised. Although parents are aware of this practice, it poses a great risk to their safety.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new behaviour policy. However, this has been ineffective in improving pupils' behaviour. Some teachers do not apply leaders' systems for managing pupils' behaviour effectively. Some staff remove pupils from lessons without following agreed procedures. Some teachers fail to challenge ongoing low-level disruption. Staff who are employed purely to deal with disruptive pupils work tirelessly to support their colleagues. Many pupils are removed from lessons for poor behaviour.
- Leaders' actions have been effective in improving pupils' rates of attendance. However, many pupils continue to arrive at school late. Staff report that it is very difficult to deal effectively with pupils who arrive late because there are so many who do so. On the first day of the inspection, some of these pupils who arrived late refused to give their names to staff.
- Senior and middle leaders have been unable to secure enough improvement in the quality of teaching. Leaders' systems for monitoring teaching lack sufficient rigour. Consequently, senior leaders have an inaccurate view of this aspect of the school.
- Staff benefit from training through the trust. This is having a positive effect on some teachers' subject knowledge and how well they organise learning over time. This is particularly the case in mathematics. However, despite the efforts of many teachers, there are too many occasions when pupils are reluctant to learn; they disrupt lessons and refuse to follow teachers' instructions. In addition, temporary staff do not receive adequate support from middle leaders to plan learning effectively or to manage pupils' behaviour.
- Middle leaders have been unable to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching in their own subject areas quickly enough. Recently, the arrangements for leadership have been restructured. Senior leaders are now able to hold middle leaders to account

more diligently for the actions that they take to improve teaching. Nonetheless, the quality of teaching remains highly dependent on the skills of individual teachers and their ability to manage pupils' behaviour. There is considerable variability in the quality of teaching over time within subject areas. As a result, too many pupils face an inequality of opportunity in terms of whether or not they benefit from teachers' high expectations and high-quality teaching.

- Since the school opened, leaders have made a number of changes to the key stage 3 and 4 curriculum. Leaders' intention is for pupils to benefit from an ambitious curriculum with a range of academic subjects. However, the reasons for some of these changes have not been made clear to some pupils in key stage 4. For example, Year 11 pupils explained to inspectors that some subjects they chose originally have been deemed by staff to be no longer appropriate. In addition, some Year 11 pupils are unsure about the GCSE examinations they will sit in the summer term. Some pupils are worried about the effect these changes may have on their choices for further education and employment. These pupils explained to inspectors how they did not feel that pupils, or parents, had been involved sufficiently in this process.
- Leaders ensure that there is provision for pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. For example, pupils learn about artists from different cultures in art and different religions through the religious education curriculum. Nonetheless, some pupils are reluctant to learn and display negative attitudes to learning in some classrooms. As a result, the impact of this provision on their personal development is, at best, variable.
- The school has well-established links with the local community. For example, pupil ambassadors are linked with vulnerable members of the community in projects such as 'Silver Surfers'. Pupil ambassadors and residents of the local community benefit from these initiatives. However, these activities are not having enough impact on changing the culture across the school.
- The work of staff to promote fundamental British values is ineffective. Some pupils' behaviour is offensive and discriminatory. Some pupils are unkind to those perceived to be different and they use homophobic language without any thought of the harm they may be causing to others. Consequently, the culture of the school limits the development of an ethos of respect and tolerance. Leaders ensure that there is provision for pupils to learn about democracy during form time. However, throughout the inspection, learning during form time was disrupted and impeded by pupils' poor behaviour. The school council is helping some pupils to understand an example of a democratic process.
- Staff provide a range of extra-curricular activities for pupils. These are well attended. Pupils have the opportunity to become involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.
- Leaders' plans to support those pupils with SEND lack rigour. The targets set for individual pupils with SEND are too general and they do not place the needs of individual pupils at the centre. Moreover, leaders do not effectively check how well additional funding is helping to improve the progress made by this group of pupils. For the past two years, pupils with SEND have fared worse than their peers in terms of the progress that they make at key stage 4.
- Leaders' use of the pupil premium funding has not brought about enough success. While additional funding has been used to improve the attendance of disadvantaged

pupils, almost one quarter of these pupils continue to be persistently absent. Leaders have also used the pupil premium funding to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics. However, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils remains weak across a range of subjects. This is especially the case for the most able disadvantaged pupils.

- Leaders have acted to improve the quality of careers education across the school. This is having a positive effect. The proportion of pupils moving on to further education, employment or training has increased.
- Leaders have worked to improve relationships with parents and the local community and have overcome a number of challenges. This has had a positive effect. However, despite leaders' efforts, over half of the 74 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would not recommend the school.
- There is no doubt that senior leaders and trust representatives have the best intentions for pupils. Since the school opened in 2016, leaders and those responsible for governance have encountered many obstacles. They have shown resilience in overcoming some of these. However, despite their ongoing perseverance, they have implemented actions to improve the school too slowly. Standards at the school remain far too low.
- It is strongly recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- The trust holds school leaders to account for their actions. For example, there are monitoring procedures in place to check whether the school is improving. However, despite these monitoring systems, some fundamental procedures at the school are not in place. The oversight of safeguarding is weak. Several checks on the suitability of staff were incomplete and were only rectified during the inspection.
- The trust delegates clear and precise responsibilities to the local governing body. The trust and the local governing body have an overgenerous view of the school. This has prevented them from making the necessary improvements quickly enough.
- Trustees and governors have pupils' best interests at heart. They have worked to overcome some considerable hurdles since the school opened. Following the secondment of a principal from the trust in September 2017, the pace of improvement has quickened. However, trustees and governors working on their behalf have been unable to move the school forward quickly enough. There have been considerable weaknesses in both senior and middle leadership. Consequently, too many pupils continue to underachieve significantly.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Some pupils do not feel safe in school. Some do not feel that staff listen to their concerns. Approximately one quarter of the 74 parents who responded to Parent View do not consider their children to be safe in school.
- Systems to ensure that adults at the school are safe to work with pupils do not meet statutory requirements. For a number of staff, the recording of checks on their

suitability to work with pupils was incomplete. Leaders ensured that this was put right during the inspection.

- Staff receive annual safeguarding training and regular updates, including 'Prevent' duty training. This 'Prevent' training teaches them how to make pupils aware of the dangers of extremism. Nonetheless, at the time of the inspection, school records showed that some staff had not undertaken all the expected safeguarding training. Leaders took the necessary steps to rectify this during the inspection.
- All staff who spoke with inspectors understand the system they should follow if they have concerns about a pupil. However, some staff are unclear about the procedures to follow if they need to raise a concern about a member of staff.
- The school has fostered strong links with external agencies. This ensures that those vulnerable pupils who raise concerns receive timely support and guidance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teachers have low expectations of pupils' attitudes and behaviour. For example, during the inspection, pupils displayed negative attitudes to learning in English, mathematics, drama, science, modern foreign languages, geography, music and religious education. Too frequently, teaching is not engaging and this is a contributory factor to pupils' poor behaviour. There are too many occasions when teachers accept or ignore poor behaviour from pupils.
- Some pupils complete work that is of a low quality. Other pupils refuse to complete their work. This is despite requests and encouragement from staff.
- When teachers do not use assessment information to plan learning, their expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Over time, teachers' weak use of assessment information means that they fail to address the needs of pupils. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.
- Some teachers do not have a secure understanding of the subject knowledge required by the age group they are working with. For example, some pupils complete work that they have already covered in primary school because some teachers do not know what pupils can already do.
- There are times when some teachers do not match work accurately to the needs of pupils with SEND. This is because the targets for such pupils are unhelpful for teachers. Teaching assistants focus on ensuring that this group of pupils 'try their best'. This does not promote high enough expectations of what this group of pupils can achieve.
- Pupils report that much of their learning is negatively affected by what they perceive as a high proportion of temporary teachers. These staff do not receive sufficient information from middle leaders to let them build up pupils' learning effectively. This is having a negative effect on the overall quality of teaching across some subject areas.
- Some pupils benefit from teaching that enables them to acquire appropriate knowledge over time. In some subjects, teachers use their strong subject knowledge to question pupils and draw on their prior learning. However, many pupils do not rise to this challenge. This is because many pupils are unfamiliar with this way of working. They have become accustomed to the low standards prevalent in so many classrooms.
- There are too many examples in pupils' books where their learning is incomplete. This

means that some pupils are not secure in their learning before they move on. This was particularly the case in modern foreign languages, religious education and science. Consequently, pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. They are unable to build on their prior learning effectively.

- There are times when teachers do not address pupils' misconceptions. Many teachers try their best to help pupils. However, some teachers are unable to rectify pupils' misunderstandings because they are preoccupied with the poor behaviour of a substantial minority of pupils in their classes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Some pupils do not feel safe in the school. Pupils explained to inspectors that bullying occurs frequently. Some pupils are not confident that teachers will listen to them or deal effectively with incidents of bullying. As a result, some pupils do not attempt to report their concerns to staff.
- Too many pupils do not display positive attitudes to learning. While some pupils strive to work hard and do their best, the inappropriate behaviour of a significant proportion of other pupils sometimes derails their learning.
- A significant minority of pupils show a complete lack of respect for each other and their teachers. There are too many occasions during learning when pupils make fun of each other and do not respect the contributions made by their peers.
- Pupils report that derogatory language and swearing is commonplace, including the use of homophobic language. The evidence gathered by the inspection team confirms that this is the case.
- Leaders have robust systems in place to check that those pupils who attend alternative provision are safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate. Throughout the inspection, inspectors observed poor behaviour during learning and around the school building, including swearing and offensive language.
- Some pupils report that fights and physical violence occur. Some pupils report that some smoke on the premises and that this goes unchallenged by staff.
- Some pupils do not conduct themselves appropriately. Too many are removed from their learning, or indeed choose to remove themselves from the classroom. These pupils are picked up by staff who patrol the corridors to support teaching staff. During the inspection, inspectors observed some teachers shouting across the corridors for support from 'on-patrol' staff.
- Low-level disruption in lessons is common, particularly in lessons where staff are inexperienced or temporary. Pupils told inspectors that other pupils frequently disrupt their learning. Their views are supported by inspection evidence, school behaviour logs

and parents' views. Most disruption occurs in classes when pupils are not taught by their usual teachers. In these lessons, pupils have come to expect poor behaviour. More worryingly, pupils accept this as the norm.

- Pupils' rates of attendance are improving towards the national averages. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is decreasing. However, almost a quarter of disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly. This has a negative effect on their progress.
- Many pupils do not arrive punctually at their lessons. Many pupils arrive at school late.
- The number of permanent exclusions, fixed-term exclusions and internal exclusions has fallen considerably. However, school records do not show a reduction in poor behaviour. A high proportion of those pupils who are excluded are disadvantaged pupils.
- Many pupils are polite and friendly. They behave well during learning despite the disruption caused by a significant minority of other pupils.
- There are clear and robust procedures in place to check on the behaviour and attendance of pupils who attend alternative provision.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Provisional information for 2018 shows that, for the past two years, pupils underachieved considerably across a range of subjects by the end of Year 11. This is especially the case in English, humanities, modern foreign languages and science. In these subjects, leaders have been unable to make sufficient improvements to pupils' progress. Overall, disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, boys and the most able pupils fared considerably worse than their peers.
- In the past, leaders have been unable to improve the progress made by disadvantaged pupils quickly enough. There have been some improvements in the attainment of this group of pupils. This is particularly the case in English and mathematics. However, provisional information about Year 11 results in 2018 shows that disadvantaged pupils made exceptionally weak progress in both of these subject areas. This is especially the case in mathematics where there had been no improvement in the progress made by this group.
- The school's information, accepted by the trust, indicates that the progress of pupils currently in Year 11 is already better than that of pupils who were in Year 11 last year. However, during the inspection, evidence gathered in lesson observations and by scrutiny of pupils' work by inspectors did not support this positive picture.
- Work in the books of some pupils shows that there are times when pupils acquire appropriate knowledge over time. This evidence suggests that some teachers are sequencing learning effectively. However, inspectors found that across subjects and year groups, there are too many occasions when pupils have gaps in their understanding. Similarly, all too often, teachers are unable to modify the poor learning habits of some pupils and this impedes their progress considerably.
- Improvements in careers education mean that most pupils go on to employment, education or training. However, pupils do not always have access to the most appropriate courses because they have underachieved significantly in their GCSE

examinations.

- Leaders check on the progress made by pupils who attend alternative provision. The progress that pupils make in alternative provision is allowing them to access further education, employment or training.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 142469 |
| Local authority | Blackpool |
| Inspection number | 10055096 |

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

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| 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 | 857 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Paul Fearnley |
| Executive Principal | Helen Mackenzie |
| Telephone number | 01253 310925 |
| Website | www.highfieldleadershipacademy.com |
| Email address | info@highfield.tetrust.org |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Star Academies multi-academy trust. The board of trustees oversees the school. It delegates some powers to a local governing body.
- The school opened as an academy in April 2016. Since then, the school has appointed an executive principal and principal. There has been one staffing restructure. This school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend the school is higher than the national average.
- Eleven pupils attend alternative provision at Educational Diversity, Athena, Oracle and The Pegasus School.

Information about this inspection

- This was an unannounced inspection. Inspectors gathered a wide range of evidence throughout the inspection. This included observations of learning, some of which were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work during learning and looked at samples of pupils' work provided by leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive principal, the principal, the vice-principal, other senior leaders, middle leaders, a group of teachers and a group of teaching assistants. They also spoke with several staff informally during the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke with a number of trust representatives, including the chief executive officer, the executive director of quality assurance and the executive director of education.
- An inspector met with two members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors. She held a telephone conversation with the head of school standards, safeguarding and inclusion for Blackpool local authority. An inspector also met with a small group of parents.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, during lessons and at social times. They observed pupils' behaviour before school, after school and at social times.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation, including leaders' self-evaluation, documentation relating to safeguarding and information relating to pupils' attendance.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors considered the 74 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, including 10 written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility.

Inspection team

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Emma Gregory, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Helen O'Neill | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| David Hampson | Ofsted Inspector |
| Deborah Bailey | Ofsted 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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