

Alsop High School Technology and Applied Learning Specialist College

Queen's Drive, Liverpool, Merseyside, L4 6SH

Inspection dates 28–29 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Fewer students are achieving five GCSE grades A* to C than most students nationally. This has been the case since 2012.
- Disadvantaged and the most able students have, over time, achieved lower standards, and made slower progress than other students in the school in a number of subjects, including in mathematics.
- Teaching does not give students enough opportunities to explain their thinking or describe what they have learned so they can write clearly and at length about what they know and understand.
- Some teachers plan tasks and activities for students that are too easy and students are not able to move on to the next stage in their learning quickly enough.
- Some subject leaders are not evaluating the quality of teaching accurately and so have an overgenerous view of its quality.
- Not enough students in the sixth form are achieving well enough in A Level and AS Level, or in vocational subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, senior leaders, the majority of middle leaders and governors are increasingly successful in driving improvement and do not now tolerate anything less than a rapid increase in standards and the rate of progress of all students.
- The current improvement in achievement of Year 7, Year 9 and Year 11 students, and of disadvantaged and more able students in the school, indicates that the school has good capacity to continue the pace of change.
- The school accurately evaluates the effectiveness of its actions to improve.
- Teaching is improving quickly, including in the sixth form, so more students are making good progress, especially in English.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around school is good and sometimes exemplary. The vast majority of students want to work hard and succeed in their learning.
- Students feel safe and their parents agree that they are well cared for.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve higher standards than similar students nationally.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students taught in a wide range of subjects across all year groups. Four lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of students’ writing completed over time, and talked to students in detail about the work in their books. They observed students around school at changes of lessons, at breaks and at lunchtimes and talked to students informally on these occasions.
- Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, with groups of teachers and formally with a number of groups of students. Inspectors also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and three governors responsible for checking standards and achievement, and with representatives from the local authority. An inspector spoke on the telephone with the local authority School Improvement Partner and with a parent.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents about the school's work including its plans to develop further its evaluation of the impact of actions taken to improve, information about assessments and students’ progress. Information about attendance and behaviour, and documents and records about safety and safeguarding, were also reviewed. Inspectors also looked closely at the school's records of the monitoring of teaching and learning, of how the school manages the performance of teachers. and Inspectors also looked at minutes of the meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors looked at the 18 responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) and also the school's surveys of parents’ views of the school.

Inspection team

Nell Banfield, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Claire Hollister	Additional Inspector
Alison O'Regan	Additional Inspector
Clive Hurran	Additional Inspector
Linda Foley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a larger than an average secondary school with a sixth form.
- The current headteacher took up his post in January 2012. There have been few staff changes overall. However, six new subject leaders have been appointed in the last 18 months, including a new leader for mathematics who was appointed in September 2014. In addition, five newly appointed pastoral leaders took up their posts during the same period of time.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is much higher than that found nationally.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by pupil premium funding (additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is twice the national average. A larger proportion of students than found nationally are looked after by the local authority.
- Most students White British . Very few students are in the early stages of learning English.
- The school has resourced provision for students with a specific learning difficulty, with currently six students on roll.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- A very small number of students from Year 10 and 11 attend courses away from the school site, for some or all of their time, at Hugh Baird College, Cornerstones Training and Everton Free School.
- School leaders work closely with the Liverpool Teaching and Learning group and with St John Bosco Teaching Alliance.
- The school has achieved Investors in People status, the Healthy Schools Award, and the Reading Kite Mark Silver award. It is recognised by the local authority as a centre of excellence for inclusion.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so it is good, and so students, including in the sixth form, make at least good progress, by making sure:
 - students are given opportunities to reflect on, and think through, their answers to questions so students can talk more extensively about what they have learned and develop their spoken language
 - students are given opportunities to share and explain their ideas and their learning with others, so they can articulate their thinking, in order to write more clearly, at length and with confidence, about what they know and understand
 - work is planned for students that is not too easy, so students can quickly move to the next stage in their learning.
- Ensure all subject leaders evaluate the quality of teaching in their subject, over time, by looking closely at the progress students make in their written work, as well as by watching teaching.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- School leaders, ably led by the headteacher, have progressively accelerated the pace of change so standards are rising and students' progress is increasing. New subject and pastoral leaders have increased the capacity and capability of middle leaders to improve achievement and behaviour, so more students, including disadvantaged and the most able students, are beginning to achieve higher standards in a number of subjects, including in mathematics. Leaders and governors are working increasingly effectively to raise expectations, which have been low for some groups of students in the past. They are effectively overcoming this legacy.
- Senior leaders, and most subject leaders, are successfully promoting an ambitious culture. Teaching in an increasing number of subjects is improving. However, some subject leaders have an unrealistically high view of the quality of teaching. They are not yet taking enough account of the progress students make in their written work when they evaluate the impact of teaching on students' learning.
- The school's evaluation of its work is accurate and realistic. Leaders can see clearly, and share with staff, what is improving and what still needs to change. Assessments measures are used carefully to identify where, and which students, are making better progress and where students may be falling behind.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is good because training for teachers is well planned and regular, and because teachers' marking of students' work has improved. Feedback to students in their books about what they need to practise to improve their learning is becoming consistently good. More leaders are now evaluating the effectiveness of teaching by using evidence from students' work as well as observations of teaching itself. Some subject leaders, however, are not looking closely enough at the progress in students' work over time as evidence of good teaching, so teaching is not consistently good in all subjects.
- Leaders and managers use additional pupil premium, and Year 7 catch-up funding, wisely to provide additional teaching and support, including intensive reading practice for those students who arrive in Year 7 needing to improve their literacy skills. A team of middle leaders keeps detailed records of how this funding is used to make sure students make good progress as a result of the extra support and teaching. Leaders acknowledge the need to close the gap in achievement between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students in the school more rapidly.
- The curriculum is carefully planned to match students' needs and future pathways. Year 8 students, and their parents, have individual interviews to help them choose suitable subjects, from the wide range offered, to follow through to GCSE and other qualifications in Year 9 and beyond. The Year 9 curriculum includes a programme of key skills to make sure students have the necessary skills and understanding to get the most out of the courses that they follow. Information, advice and guidance given to students overall at transition points, including into the sixth form, is good. Students in Year 7 and Year 8 have many opportunities to improve their reading skills and students spoke with enthusiasm about the extensive after-school programme of sporting and activities in drama and music. Overall, the curriculum prepares students well for the future.
- The school makes sure that those very few students who attend courses away from the school site work towards vocational qualifications that will help them in the future. They attend English and mathematics examination courses back in school with their peers to make sure they achieve well.
- The school organises a wide range of events, assemblies and classroom activities to develop students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural understanding and awareness. Students understand the complexities of friendship and the difference between real friends and people who may try to exploit friendship. They are well aware of current concerns about radicalisation and students spoken to understood clearly when to seek help or reassurance if they were concerned about difficult or unusual situations.
- The school includes an extensive range of events and experiences to ensure students have the opportunity to listen, talk about and reflect on diverse ways of life in England and internationally. Students talked with understanding about how other families may have different beliefs and customs to their own. Students' behaviour and attitudes in and around school reflect this respect for difference; the school is very successful in fostering good relationships and in tackling discrimination.
- Staff are guiding students to hold an election on the same day as the general election and students have listened to speeches about the different policies and beliefs from each political party in preparation for this. As a result, they are exploring the nature of British democracy and values and finding out in practice about how governments are run in this country and in others.
- Leaders and governors work together well to discuss and agree about when teachers are to be rewarded, or their status increased, in recognition of teaching that promotes good and better progress for students.

Teachers are accountable for their teaching but are also well supported in improving.

- The school works exceptionally well with local primary schools to make sure students arrive in Year 7 and quickly settle in the school. The English department speaks at local and regional events about how it has developed its strong and consistently good teaching. School leaders are working closely with the Liverpool Teaching and Learning group in developing their assessments systems for September and with St John Boscoe Teaching Alliance to share assessments to make sure that they are accurate.
- There is good communication between the school and leaders of provision off-site to ensure students behave and attend well and make the progress that they should in the subjects taught.
- The local authority is providing very effective support for the school, for example, in establishing a Challenge Board for leaders and governors to ensure both groups have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas where improvement still needs to happen.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding student and staff are strong and effective, and meet statutory requirements. Staff and governors receive suitable and timely training to ensure they are up to date with current requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a clear view of the school's strengths and where improvement is happening, including in the quality of teaching. They understand achievement and progress data sufficiently to robustly challenge senior and middle leaders when they receive regular reports on teaching, students' progress and achievement.
 - Governors work closely with the headteacher and senior leaders to support them in identifying actions needed, including changes in key staff roles, so that improvements accelerate. They have supported school leaders well in establishing a well-structured system to reward good teaching and action to address any underperformance.
 - They understand how additional Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding is used and how its effectiveness is measured from the detailed information that they are given. They know most disadvantaged students, and the most able students, are making better progress.
 - Governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are robust and effective in keeping students and staff safe in the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students are polite and show respect for each other, for adults, and for the school environment generally. The majority of students' written work is well presented overall. A small minority of books show alterations and untidy written work, which appears to be mostly a result of frustration at trying to capture their thinking in their writing, or frustration with errors that they have made.
- Students benefit from extensive opportunities to take part in team and community events, to contribute to the school's strong partnerships with local primary schools, and to the school's debating society. Students recently had the opportunity to act as guides to others during the Anne Frank Trust's Holocaust Memorial Day to commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz.
- Students are keen to learn and over half of students invited to Saturday and holiday catch-up and revision sessions regularly attend. The level of participation in school trips, events and competitions demonstrates students' appreciation of the quality of their school experience.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- All students say that they feel safe, well supervised and are well cared for, and parents agree. Students spoken to did not hesitate to say that they would go to a member of staff if they were concerned or worried about anything. They say that bullying of any kind is rare and if it happens, the school deals with it swiftly and effectively. They understand clearly, as a result of the school's guidance and because of the teaching in personal education sessions, about different forms of bullying and the risks of using social networking sites. They also understand how mobile phones can be misused, and any issues of this kind have been effectively resolved by the school.
- Incidents of discriminatory and derogatory language, for example about others' sexual orientation, religion or beliefs, being used as a form of name-calling are rare. The school is very successful in establishing and sustaining a harmonious school culture where difference is accepted and all are included.

- Attendance is increasing steadily and is now close to the national average. The school 'goes the extra mile' to support students and families having difficulty in establishing regular attendance or in meeting the school's expectations of consistently good behaviour. As a result, the proportion of students who are persistently absent from school, or who might be excluded for a short period from school for inappropriate behaviour, is reducing.
- Students attending courses away from the school site are safe because careful attention is given to how they travel to and from the setting. Leaders ensure the safeguarding arrangements of all settings are secure so students are safe on the premises.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Students' learning and progress and their attitudes to their studies have improved significantly because teaching is improving. However, this is not consistently the case across all subjects. Students' progress, for example, has only recently begun to improve more quickly in mathematics and in geography. Teaching in science remains variable so students do not always make rapid progress.
- Students are invariably attentive in lessons and their written work is mostly accurate, shows sustained effort, and is well presented. However, in discussion with students about their work, they could identify tasks they had completed which repeated what they already knew, or where they had not had to think hard in order to complete the activity. This was seen in some teaching during the inspection. Where work is too easy for students, they complete it quickly and do not move on to the next stage in their learning at a good rate.
- In some lessons, and in students' written work, there were examples of short paragraphs where students struggled to express what they knew. When students were asked about what they knew, they could explain their ideas but could not always capture the more complex aspects in extended writing. As a result, students are not always able to show the standards of work of which they are capable.
- In some teaching, questioning of students and their responses only identifies their surface understanding and deeper ideas and concepts are not effectively developed. They remain dependent on their teachers for guidance as to what they need to remember or write down.
- Students are impressively enthusiastic when they are given a range of interesting and intriguing information to discuss. They are able to work together to find examples of literary techniques and they clarify their understanding of the techniques as a result. The writing they produce from these activities is of high quality.
- The teaching of disabled students and students with special educational needs is consistently good and students are well supported in making good progress by support from well-trained teaching assistants.
- Marking of students' work has been effectively developed and is mostly consistent across subjects. Students can identify occasions in their books where suggestions made by teachers have helped them to improve their work.
- The school has taken very effective steps to improve reading levels of students and students read a range of material regularly with enjoyment. Students' reading ages are showing rapid improvement. Their communication skills are less effectively developed in teaching. The teaching of mathematics is becoming stronger and actions are now possible to begin to develop numeracy skills across subjects, so students understand, for example, that constructing a line or bar graph in history or science lessons requires the same approach as in mathematics lessons.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students enter the school working at standards close to, or slightly below, national averages. In the past, most students have made slow progress and attained standards below national averages as a result. The current achievement of students requires improvement because, although the actions taken by the school are improving the achievement of many students, not all students are achieving as well as they should.
- The proportion of students in 2013 to 2014 who achieved five GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was well below the national average. Students have steadily improved their achievement in English over time, but fewer students made good enough progress in mathematics, geography or science, and particularly disadvantaged students. Students achieved higher standards in Spanish.
- The school's measures of progress, work in students' books, and observations of learning, including in mathematics, indicate students' progress, including the progress of disadvantaged and the most able students, is improving. Current information on the progress of students in Year 10 and Year 11 indicates

their progress is improving in a number of subjects and standards are likely to rise in 2015. The progress of Year 7 students is improving significantly and most students in Year 9 are beginning to make faster progress in English and mathematics. More students are now making the progress expected of them.

- From their different starting points, disadvantaged students make expected progress and gaps between their progress and other students in the school, and students nationally, are closing.
- In 2013 to 2014, in English, disadvantaged students attained half of a grade lower than non-disadvantaged students in the school and non-disadvantaged students nationally. In mathematics, disadvantaged students attained just over half a grade lower than non-disadvantaged students in the school and two thirds of a grade lower than non-disadvantaged students nationally.
- Students that are looked after by the local authority achieve very well due to very effective care and support.
- The most able students made good progress in English but slower progress in mathematics than the most able students nationally because their progress is carefully monitored by a designated leader who ensures they are supported to improve if they fall behind. Steps have been taken to make sure that teachers of the most able groups in particular have high expectations of their progress in lessons, especially in mathematics.
- Disabled students and students with special educational needs made progress faster than similar students nationally and achieve well from their starting points, including in English and mathematics.
- Students in the resource base make very good progress because staff understand their needs well and are skilled in overcoming barriers to their learning. Teaching assistants who support them in lessons are well trained in ensuring students develop their own ways of overcoming their difficulties. Students do not become over reliant on staff support.
- Students who attend courses away from the school site, for some or all of the time, are making good progress in their vocational courses because their progress is closely monitored.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Achievement in the sixth form in A Level and AS Level has been significantly below national averages for the last three years. Current school measures of progress in a number of subjects, and the quality of learning in lessons and in students' work, all indicate that achievement in students' second year of A level is improving. Achievement at A Level is likely to rise as a result in 2015.
- Improvement in students' achievement is not consistent across all subjects. Achievement in vocational subjects and at AS level is overall lower than in academic subjects and signs of improvement are not as evident in students' work and in their learning in lessons. Disadvantaged students are making similar progress as the majority of students in the sixth form.
- A small number of students follow Level 2 GCSE courses in English; a larger number follow Level 2 GCSE courses in mathematics. In 2014, a quarter of students attained grade C in mathematics and around a third of students achieved a grade C in English. In 2015, the school anticipates these proportions will rise to above a third likely to attain grade C in mathematics and almost a half of students to gain a grade C in English. Just over a half of students will not attain a grade C in English and/or mathematics. Therefore, achievement in the sixth form requires improvement.
- The school has taken steps to improve teaching that leads to students making good progress in the sixth form in order to improve achievement. However, although teaching is improving rapidly, better progress is not consistently evident in student outcomes, so teaching requires improvement.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good. Students are well supported. Guidance for their personal development and their career considerations and choices is good. Students and their families have an individual programme of interviews and discussions so that they can be advised on the most appropriate courses for their chosen pathway after Year 13.
- Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their decisions about their conduct and choices and their attitudes to their work are positive. Students spoken to described with some warmth the school's efforts to challenge and support their achievement and progress, including disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs. All students feel safe and well cared for.
- Attendance has improved and is now closer to the national average. Attendance overall improved by 1.2% in 2013 to 2014 as a result of actions taken by pastoral leaders.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders have a very strong understanding of achievement data. They know where improvement needs to take place and where improvements are beginning to happen. They take effective steps to find where students or teachers are underperforming and to support improvement. Achievement is improving but not consistently across subjects and courses.

- An above average proportion of students remain on their courses from Year 12 through to Year 13. High numbers of students are successful in moving on to university courses and apprenticeships.
- The sixth form curriculum offers a good range of subjects, which provides students with the right courses to follow through to employment, education or training after Year 13. The school's enrichment programme and non-qualification programme includes academic writing, a debating society, guest speakers from different career pathways, university mentors and work experience. The sixth form Study Programme has provided a model for other schools in the area.

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	104693
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	461769

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
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	1,658
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	369
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marilyn Fielding
Headteacher	Joe Mangan
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2011
Telephone number	0151 235 1200
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