

Armthorpe Academy

Mere Lane, Armthorpe, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN3 2DA

Inspection dates

8–9 January 2019

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| 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 |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have taken decisive action to raise pupils' attendance, and improve outcomes and the quality of teaching. These actions have contributed to marked improvements in these areas over the past 12 months.
- Governors are dedicated and have enhanced the support and challenge they provide to school leaders. Their increasing ability to hold leaders to account is contributing well to the pace of improvement.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and improving. Most teachers demonstrate high expectations. These heightened expectations, alongside more accurate assessment, are contributing to the good progress pupils are currently making.
- The support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive has improved. However, teachers do not routinely plan to meet the additional needs of these pupils.
- Leaders are honest in their evaluation of the school's effectiveness. They are not afraid to change their approach if needed. A recent review highlighted that pupils access a largely broad and balanced curriculum. However, leaders are working to improve provision in religious education and the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum.
- Rates of absence and persistent absence have reduced significantly. Leaders have introduced strategies to support all pupils and specifically those pupils who previously did not attend school as often as they should. From low starting points, pupils' attendance is now similar to that of other pupils nationally.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. The vast majority of pupils are respectful, eager to learn and hold their teachers in high regard. A small minority of pupils do not always behave well; these pupils account for the majority of fixed-term exclusions, which remain above the national average.
- Outcomes are good. Between 2017 and 2018, most pupils made significant gains in their learning, achieving well from below average starting points. Nevertheless, the most able pupils' progress is not as strong as that of other groups.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is having a positive effect. Disadvantaged pupils' rate of progress across a wide range of subjects is in line with that of their peers and other pupils nationally. Nevertheless, leaders are unclear which improvement strategies are the most effective.
- The increasing number of pupils who join the school part-way through the year receive effective support. Most pupils quickly integrate into the school and make new friends.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of leadership and management further so that all pupils, particularly pupils with SEND and the most able, make even better progress by:
 - refining written guidance designed to support teachers' understanding of pupils' additional needs
 - ensuring that teachers use the information provided to them by the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) to plan and deliver lessons that meet the additional needs of pupils with SEND
 - redrafting and evaluating plans to spend additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils so that leaders have a thorough understanding of those strategies that work and those that do not
 - swiftly introducing new curriculum plans designed to strengthen pupils' learning in religious education and PSHE lessons
 - eradicating the small minority of less-effective teaching that exists.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare further by:
 - reducing the number of pupils who are excluded for a fixed term
 - sustaining the significant improvements in pupils' attendance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The quality of leadership has improved considerably since the previous inspection in October 2016. Leaders, including governors, set the bar high. They have established a truly inclusive school in which pupils from different starting points and backgrounds are encouraged to achieve well and 'maximise their own potential'. Leaders have secured significant improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- Senior and subject leaders have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the quality of provision in school. This is because leaders conduct regular checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Well-established systems are now in place to ensure that all staff systematically check the quality and effectiveness of their own work and of those they may manage.
- Staff training is responsive to emerging needs. Senior leaders keep a close eye on the consistency with which staff apply school policies. Accordingly, the quality of training that staff receive from senior leaders is of a high standard. Nearly all staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey said that leaders use professional development effectively to encourage, challenge and support their improvement.
- When something does not work as well as it should, leaders are not afraid to 'go back to the drawing board'. For example, leaders' recent audit of PSHE education highlighted that, although appropriate, the curriculum could be refined further to ensure that pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding relating to financial education are improved. Consequently, some pupils are taught discrete finance lessons in mathematics and the curriculum offer has been changed for September 2019 to ensure that pupils are given more time in PSHE lessons.
- Leaders' plans to improve the school are far more precise than they were 12 months ago at the time of the last Ofsted monitoring visit. Plans now highlight by whom, when and how progress will be evaluated. Furthermore, leaders' work is prioritised on those aspects of the school's work that need the most attention. This approach has led to some significant improvements in pupils' rates of progress and attendance.
- The quality of subject leadership is strong and improving. Subject leaders have worked closely with senior leaders to develop a clearer understanding of the standards they should expect from their teams. A number of subject leaders are adept at holding others to account. This, and additional leadership support from the multi-academy trust (the trust), is contributing to stronger outcomes in mathematics and, lately, for the most able pupils across the school. However, standards of written presentation in some pupils' books is untidy and work is sometimes unfinished. Some subject leaders insist that staff consistently follow department guidelines, but this is not consistent across the school.
- Following a period of staffing turbulence, a permanent SENCo was appointed last year. This brought much needed stability and a renewed vigour to the special educational needs (SEN) department. While there is still much work to do to ensure pupils with SEND receive consistently strong support, the SENCo has ensured that statutory

guidance for SEN is now closely followed, although inconsistency remains in the quality of support that pupils with SEND receive.

- Newly qualified and recently qualified teachers say that they are supported well by leaders. They appreciate the regular opportunities to observe and learn from more experienced colleagues. This group of teachers make a significant contribution to the improving standards of teaching in the school. Consequently, they are well regarded by the pupils that they teach.
- Leaders use additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils well. Across the school, disadvantaged pupils make progress that is in line with or above that of their peers. Rates of progress for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 compare favourably with those of other pupils nationally. However, leaders' plans and evaluations relating to additional funding are not sufficiently sharp to enable leaders to know for certain which strategies have a profound effect on disadvantaged pupils' learning.
- Following a recent review, leaders have started to make some changes to the key stage 3 curriculum. Leaders recognise that current arrangements to teach religious education content in 8 weeks per year are insufficient and do not contribute to pupils developing an appropriate understanding of religion and ethics. Similarly, leaders are investigating new opportunities that will provide pupils with more time to learn about more detailed spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues.

Governance of the school

- The quality of governance has improved substantially in a short space of time. Members of the local governing body (LGB) and trustees provide principled leadership that is appropriately focused on the needs of the pupils. As one governor described, 'we have a moral responsibility as well as a statutory responsibility to do what is right for all our children'.
- Following an external review of governance and a recent skills audit, governors now have a clear understanding of their collective strengths and areas of weakness. They, and the trust, have been successful in seeking new governors to complement the LGB and address a skills deficit.
- Governors understand the importance of holding leaders to account for the educational standards in school. To this end, governors have sought advice and attended training to help them ask pertinent questions of leaders. As a result, they are providing support and challenge that is contributing well to the school's accelerating improvement.
- Governors ensure that they do not accept information from staff without questioning its validity or purpose. For example, at the start of the academic year, governors met with individual senior leaders so that they could appraise leaders' work and gain a better understanding of the quality of education pupils receive. In addition, and following a recommendation from the governance review, governors visit the school more regularly. These visits have a clear purpose and information is shared in a timely manner with leaders and other governors.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Staff know pupils well. Nearly all pupils who responded to Ofsted’s pupil survey said that there is an adult in school that they can talk to if they have a problem or concern. The strong relationships between staff and pupils ensure that concerns that may be upsetting for pupils are dealt with swiftly.
- Pupils say that they feel safe. They learn how to stay safe when using the internet and about the risks they may face locally and further afield.
- Leaders make appropriate pre-recruitment checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with pupils. All staff receive safeguarding training during, and after, induction.
- Leaders ensure that the temporary site conditions during the construction of the new school building do not pose any risk to pupils. A large number of staff supervise pupils during breaktime and during lesson changeover. Pupils move around the site and construction fencing sensibly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching has improved by some distance since the previous inspection and improvement has further gathered pace in the past 12 to 18 months. It is no coincidence that pupils across the school made much stronger progress during the last academic year.
- The majority of teaching is characterised by purposeful working relationships between pupils and teachers, meaningful discussion, healthy debate and increasingly higher expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Most teachers use assessment well to gain an accurate understanding of what pupils can and cannot do. Well-established classroom routines present some teachers with the opportunity to spend extended periods of time circulating the classroom, identifying misconceptions and offering pupils alternative strategies to reach suitable conclusions and/or answers.
- Teachers encourage pupils to think for themselves. They use questioning effectively to probe pupils’ understanding or provide clues to the location of answers. Additionally, some teachers ask alternative rhetorical questions that stimulate pupils’ curiosity. For example, in a Year 11 history class, pupils were revising the topic of immigration to the United States of America. Some pupils did not immediately understand the traditional language used in the poem ‘The New Colossus’ by Emma Lazarus. When asked to explain the meaning of the words, the teacher skilfully redirected pupils to different parts of a poem to help them unpick the meaning and political viewpoint.
- Over time, teachers have not pitched work effectively to enable the most able pupils to make good progress. Leaders are working with teachers on new strategies to challenge these pupils more appropriately, although developments remain at an early stage.
- Teachers do not rush the delivery of subject content to ensure that they finish the course. They encourage pupils to reflect upon and improve their written work. Pupils say that they welcome the opportunity to go over their work again as this helps them build a better understanding of each concept or topic.
- The monitoring inspection in January 2018 highlighted that ‘not all teachers use the information provided to them by the SENCo to plan and deliver lessons that meet the additional needs of pupils with SEND’. Inspection evidence demonstrates that, although

improving, some teachers still do not plan to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils in school. Consequently, rates of progress for pupils with SEND are not improving as quickly as they could.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The number of pupils who transfer to the school part-way through the academic year is rising. Teachers and staff get to know new pupils quickly. Because of this, pupils who need additional help or support on arrival are well looked after. The majority of new starters integrate into the school effectively, promptly making new friends. One parent spoke for a number of others when saying: 'The school couldn't have been more supportive. They helped my child settle in quickly and made several follow-up telephone calls to keep me up to date.'
- Careers education is strong. Pupils learn about vocational options from key stage 3 onwards. Leaders regularly evaluate the careers education curriculum against national benchmarks. The vast majority of pupils who responded to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire said that the school provides them with information about their next steps. By the time they are in Year 11, many pupils have a clear idea of what career they would like to pursue and how they will do so.
- Pupils have a developed understanding about different cultures. In lessons and assemblies, they learn about the contrasts between urban and rural living in the global community. For example, in a Year 8 geography lesson, pupils completed a decision-making activity that helped them to better understand living conditions for families residing in the shanty town of Soweto, South Africa. In a Year 8 tutor group, pupils engaged in meaningful discussion relating to the value of liberty and war.
- Pupils recognise that bullying can manifest itself in many ways. The vast majority of pupils say that if bullying does happen, teachers are really good at resolving it.
- The absence of a consistent and coordinated school approach to pupils' presentation leads to inconsistencies within and beyond subjects. Pupils do not always take pride in their work or use their initiative to catch up on missed work.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of most pupils is good and improving.
- The diligent work of leaders to reverse a decline in pupils' attendance is paying off. In January 2018, pupils' attendance was well below average and a significant proportion of pupils were persistently absent. Closer monitoring of pupils' attendance patterns, additional staffing, revised incentives and improved communication with families are just a few of the successful strategies that have led to rates of attendance increasing. Currently, pupils' attendance is broadly average and persistent absence is below average.
- The attendance of the small number of pupils who attend alternative education provision is poor. However, for most, rates of attendance are improving when

compared to their time at school. Staff make daily attendance and welfare checks on the pupils who attend alternative education provision. However, procedures to contact pupils, parents and carers when a pupil is absent and unreachable are not tight enough.

- Rates of fixed-term exclusion are above the national averages, having increased recently. This follows a reduction between 2016 and 2017. However, a significant number of fixed-term exclusions can be attributed to a small number of pupils, some of whom have recently joined the school. These pupils are taking much longer to learn to adhere to the high standards of behaviour expected of them.
- Most pupils move from one lesson to the next sensibly and swiftly. Very few pupils are late to lessons. Pupils gladly engage in discussion with staff and visitors. Pupil prefects sometimes take the lead and supervise their peers during lunchtimes. Relationships between most pupils are cordial.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Between 2016 and 2018, pupils at the end of key stage 4 made average progress. However, leaders' focused actions and stronger teaching recently are contributing to current pupils making significant gains in their learning.
- Pupils in key stages 3 and 4 make equally strong progress. Most teachers now have higher expectations which motivate a larger proportion of pupils. Furthermore, when coupled with work that is well matched to their ability, this leads to many pupils making good progress from their different starting points.
- Inspection evidence demonstrates that the most able pupils are challenged in their work more than in the past, particularly in key stage 3. Consequently, attainment is rising and the pupils with high prior attainment on entry are making far better progress than they did before.
- Between 2016 and 2017, disadvantaged pupils' progress was weak. This improved significantly in 2018; disadvantaged pupils outperformed their peers and other pupils nationally in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Currently, disadvantaged pupils across the school continue to achieve well.
- Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is usually well below that attained by other pupils nationally. However, with the exception of the 2017 year group, the proportion of pupils who achieve a good pass in their GCSE English and mathematics examinations is broadly average. This represents good progress for the majority of pupils from their starting points.
- Approximately one third of pupils join the school in Year 7 requiring additional support to help with their reading. Pupils receive swift intervention by trained staff using specialist reading programmes and software. This, and specific phonics teaching, enable pupils to swiftly close the gap between their reading and their chronological age.
- The proportion of pupils who go on to further education, employment or training is improving. Information provided by the school suggests that fewer than 4% of pupils did not find a suitable placement in 2018.

- Although improving, the progress of pupils with SEND is not as good as that of other groups of pupils. This is because support plans are not consistently helping teachers to plan to meet pupils' needs.
- The school's own information and feedback from alternative education providers highlight that pupils' below average attendance is having a detrimental effect on the progress they make in English and mathematics. The achievement of pupils who attend alternative education providers has not improved significantly.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 138314 |
| Local authority | Doncaster |
| Inspection number | 10059060 |

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 | 497 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Sally Shearman |
| Principal | Andy Peirson |
| Telephone number | 01302 831582 |
| Website | www.armthorpeschool.org.uk/ |
| Email address | admin@armthorpe.doncaster.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 4–5 October 2016 |

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of pupils attending the school are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below average.
- The school is a member of the Consilium multi-academy trust. Responsibility for the school rests with trustees who delegate some powers to the local governing board. The mission statement of the trust is to 'surround children with all things noble'. Consilium multi-academy trust website and scheme of delegation can be found at: <http://consilium-at.com/about-us/>.
- Currently, the school uses full-time alternative education provision at Learning Centre, Maple Young Mums, JASP Education Centre and St Wilfrid's Academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 40 lessons across the school. Many of the observations of lessons were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior and subject leaders, teachers, members of the local governing board, including the chair of governors, and the lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work during lessons and with a group of subject leaders in mathematics, history, geography and ethics. In addition, an inspector scrutinised a large sample of workbooks belonging to the most able pupils in key stages 3 and 4.
- An inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of one alternative education provider used by the school in addition to meeting another.
- Inspectors held informal and formal discussions with many pupils and observed interactions during social times.
- Inspectors listened to a group of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils read.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and scrutinised a wide range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation, analysis of performance information, action plans and evaluations, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding files, recruitment checks and governor minutes.
- Inspectors took into account the 43 responses from parents who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Forty-eight members of staff and 45 pupils completed Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys. All of these responses were taken into consideration.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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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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