

Visit Report

Spring Term 2018

School Name: **Aldersley High School**

Visit Reference:	School Review	Date of Visit:	26/01/2018 08:00-16.00
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Comments:

Purpose of the review

1. To form a view on the progress of the school towards an outstanding judgment.
2. To review the quality of teaching and pupil progress.
3. To include a check of the school's safeguarding arrangements.
4. To provide an opportunity for middle leaders to account for achievements in their areas.

Three school improvement advisers carried out the following activities:

- Meeting with Senior Leaders regarding the curriculum and student progress data.
- Meetings with staff responsible for: safeguarding, SEND, attendance and conduct.
- Meeting with staff responsible for the sixth form.
- Scrutiny of the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning documentation.
- Learning walks, jointly with school leaders, to lessons across Key Stages 3, 4 and 5.
- Scrutiny of students' books during learning walks.
- Discussions with middle leaders responsible for English, maths, science and languages.
- Discussions with Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 student groups.

1. Progress of the school towards an outstanding judgment

- All findings for the areas within in the remit of this review confirm judgements in the school's self-evaluation and align closely with Ofsted grade descriptors for an outstanding judgement. Leaders have, in the words of such an Ofsted descriptor for outstanding, "created a culture that enables pupils and staff to excel".
- Key strategic documents are successfully communicated to all staff setting a clear direction and purpose for the school. Colleagues at all levels understand their role in improvement initiatives. The systematic approach to self-evaluation is rooted in a broad and reliable evidence base. School improvement actions are well matched to needs and contribute to very positive pupil progress.
- Alongside the effective systems is a strong emphasis on developing an excellent workforce. Leaders have high expectations of staff but enable them to meet these through support, challenge, professional development and recognition of talent. This includes successful examples of initial teacher training, "growing their own" teaching staff from other roles within the school, deploying staff across the two schools within the Trust and recognising and deploying early leadership potential.
- The outcomes for 2017 were very positive. Progress 8 was in the top 20% quintile for at least two years for all pupils; also for two groups - low prior attainers and disadvantaged pupils. The progress 8 open element was in the top 20% quintile for the last two years, as was added value in humanities. In 2017 subject added value was in

the second quintile (between top 40% and top 20%) for all other key measures, with the exception of languages which was just below this quintile.

- Reliable internal data shows that progress is increasing further in current Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 year groups, and that disadvantaged gaps are closing further. This takes into account that students lower down the school had higher prior attainment, and that the ECDL IT qualification is no longer counted in calculations of progress. Together with the 2017 outcomes this points towards an outstanding judgement.
- The sixth form is very well led; leaders know the strategic strengths and priorities and at the same time have detailed knowledge of sixth form teaching and individual student's progress. Informed self-review and associated actions are leading to improvements at A-level, where progress has previously been average, compared to the established, significantly above average progress in Applied General qualifications. Improvements at A-level may need to be further secured to complete a best fit match with an outstanding judgement for 16-19 programmes of study.
- Students are full of praise for the teaching, support and guidance that they receive. The school places a particular emphasis on employability from Year 7 onwards, as a result of which students aspire to do well and have ambitious plans for their futures.

2. Review of the quality of teaching and pupil progress

- Teachers have high expectations of students. They plan programmes of work and lessons very effectively; the engaging activities and sequences of learning enable students to make strong progress. Teachers build in differentiated resources and questioning, adjust teaching plans and groupings, based on their reviews of assessment data. This ensures that students from all starting points, including the least and most able, make excellent progress.
- Teachers challenge their students to think, participate in, and take responsibility for, their learning. For example a timed revision activity in Year10 history which involved students moving around the room building on each other's ideas for a wide range of essay titles, rapidly consolidating and developing their own and each other's understanding.
- Post 16 teaching is based on similar strategies as for lower years, with sixth formers as active learners being stretched by challenging tasks and high expectations.
- All subjects are contributing to the development of students' literacy. Teachers emphasise subject specific vocabulary and expect students to be able to use key words accurately – for example in their second music lesson Year 7 were using terms such as texture and dynamics confidently. In addition to the use of key words there is an emphasis on structuring writing and redrafting, for example in Year 8 French substantial pieces of writing were redrafted in order to reach the highest standards. Confident speaking skills are also encouraged, such as prompts in Year 7 English: "I strongly disagree because..."
- Presentation in students' books is of a high standard. The system of teachers marking pages A, B or C, according to clear expectations of presentation, is understood by students; they experience this consistently across the curriculum and, as a result, take pride in the quality of work in their books. The work of post 16 students is kept in an organised fashion which enhances learning and revision.
- Marking policy is embedded across the school including the sixth form. Teachers' thorough diagnostic marking identifies the achievement of specific criteria and aspects for improvement or achieving next steps. They demonstrate a clear understanding of assessment criteria through their self and peer assessment. Students capitalise on opportunities to use feedback to make further progress.
- Students know their long term targets and within individual lessons, they know what standard they are aiming for, often because the teacher has modelled "what a good one looks like". The use of personalised learning checklists helps students to identify what they can do and where gaps in learning need addressing. Students have been trained to understand how progress is measured and many find this motivating.
- Marking feedback and assessment data identifies gaps in learning; there are then timely systems in place to address these. The first emphasis is on teachers adjusting classroom teaching to meet the students' needs but there are also a wide range of interventions before and after school, in tutor time and through online resources. The role of the assistant standards leaders (ASLs) is highly effective in identifying, coordinating and monitoring individual's intervention programmes.

- In addition to the broad 11- 18 curriculum, and additional interventions, there is a wide range of enrichment activities. For example students spoke enthusiastically about sports clubs and of the benefits of participating in the debating club.

3. Checking the school's safeguarding arrangements

3a. Safeguarding

- Safeguarding is effective with strong procedures that meet all statutory requirements. Records are complete, detailed and of high quality; policies are regularly reviewed and updated. Safeguarding is regularly subject to external verification and link governor monitoring.
- The designated safeguarding leads are proactive in ensuring staff receive appropriate, frequent and up-to-date briefings and training, which ensures that they understand well their responsibility to keep students and learners safe.
- Leaders make timely and appropriate use of other agencies and organisations to promote safeguarding and to support responses to any concerns.
- There are various mechanisms which enable and support students to report any concerns, such as the website button and worry box; students are confident that these will always be dealt with appropriately by staff.
- Students are effectively taught how to keep safe through the curriculum, PSHE days, assemblies and tutor times.
- Students welfare is actively promoted in the school and as a result students feel safe, secure and valued; they describe it as being part of a team and a community.
- The school has recently achieved an anti-bullying award; students are proud of this and were key in its achievement. The role and impact of students as "be safe ambassadors" and peer mentors were integral to this work.

3b. Behaviour

- Staff have high expectations of behaviour which students live up to and surpass. Pupils have highly positive attitudes to learning. They want to learn and do well, and take great pride in their work. During the review no low level disruption was seen in lessons because the teaching was engaging all students. Standards of uniform are exemplary and conduct around the building calm and orderly.
- Students have high aspirations for themselves due to a rich range of opportunities, which start early from Year 7 upwards, such as visits to and from businesses and higher education institutions, as well as through the curriculum
- Sanctions are applied consistently according to school policy; these are monitored so that leaders are aware if particular student groups, lessons or teachers are causing a concern, in which case swift action is taken – for example coaching for staff needing extra support in behaviour management.
- Students are motivated by the rewards system. Those doing particularly well in any aspect of school life are proud to earn additional rewards, such as hot chocolate Fridays.
- Students know who to approach for either pastoral or academic support. Additional staff are currently being appointed to a revised pastoral support structure in order to add capacity to day to day issues responses.
- Fixed term exclusions, at 5.7% in 2016, were above national levels but these are reducing due to the increasing range of strategies available such as in house referral facilities. There were recently two permanent exclusions although in 2015 to 2017 there were none.

3c. Attendance

- At the time of the review absence is 4.6% which is below last year's National figure. Staff resources and clear procedures are in place to maximise student attendance. There was a decline in attendance in 2016-17 due to holiday leave, even though such absences were not authorised.
- Persistent absence, currently 8.7%, is also below National. There is currently a focus on the higher persistent absence in Year 10; the HERO initiative which actively involves parents in addressing this issue is having a positive impact.

- Most students arrive promptly to school and any that are late receive same day sanctions which are effective in minimising lateness.

3d SEND

- Provision for students with SEND rightly starts with the school's teaching and learning strategies and training for all staff in meeting the needs of students in their classes. Additional interventions are carefully tailored and monitored to meet specific needs, for example provision for an identified group of Year 8 boys is currently being reviewed in order to improve their engagement and progress.

4. Middle leader accountability

- Clear lines of accountability and frequent checks at a number of levels ensure that middle leaders are clear about the school priorities. Senior leaders ensure that subject leaders have the knowledge and skills to secure high standards in their own subjects. They are enabled and empowered to lead their areas of responsibility and also trusted to innovate within the accountability framework. This results in a committed and skilled team of middle leaders who are ambitious for their teams and students.
- Middle leaders ensure assessment tasks are of a consistent standard and that judgements are moderated. They ensure that staff in their teams are using data on the performance of both groups and individuals in their care in order to support accelerated progress. If their analysis of data shows that the progress of any group has slowed they quickly adjust student programmes of learning and implement interventions so that any slippage in learning is minimised.
- Leaders for English and maths are clear about what has worked well and led to very positive student progress in 2017. However, they are far from complacent and continue to review and refine departmental strategies to enable students to reach the highest standards.
- There is clarity in science about very specific groups who have made less progress within the overall positive student progress, for example Year 8 SEND students. Focused short term interventions have been carefully evaluated and the impact of the academic coach for science is particularly impressive.
- As a result of senior leaders action to increase the percentage of students studying and achieving well in the EBACC, leadership for languages is adapting the curriculum and teaching strategies to ensure they meet the demands of the new GCSE specifications which will now be taken by ninety percent of students. Within this larger cohort the languages department are clear about action for priority groups who have historically made less progress – disadvantaged students and boys with high prior attainment.

Recommendations

- Continue to focus on increasing rates of progress for the most able, including at A-level.
- Further develop teachers' skills in building on student responses to questioning/discussion to secure and extend understanding.
- Consider using the terminology of Ofsted judgments within the SEF.
- Consider compiling case studies for small post 16 groups where value added has historically varied from year to year.
- Ensure all middle leaders are able to discuss their areas of responsibility concisely and objectively to line managers, governors and external quality assurance.