

# Alt Academy

Alt Lane, Oldham, Lancashire OL8 2EL

## Inspection dates

12–13 September 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Senior leaders provide highly effective and ambitious leadership in this improving school. Teaching is good and pupils' outcomes are improving rapidly.
- An ethos of respect underpins every aspect of the school's work. Staff and pupils show great respect for each other and for the pupils' right to receive a good education.
- Pupils are well motivated and have positive attitudes to their education. They take the view that if they cannot solve a problem, it is simply that they cannot solve it yet.
- Clear, inclusive school values and British values are evident across the curriculum. The school celebrates diversity and ensures equal opportunities for all.
- Senior leaders and trustees have very high expectations and, as a result, pupils make good, rapid progress across each key stage. However, there is a legacy of underachievement, so attainment is below average.
- Teachers use assessment information well and set work which helps pupils to make good progress. However, the level of challenge could be greater for most-able pupils. A smaller proportion of these pupils reach above-average standards than is the case in schools nationally.
- Although pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is good, progress in writing and mathematics is better than in reading.
- Pupils are making better progress in reading in key stage 1 as the result of new teaching methods introduced last year. However, although standards are rising, the percentage of pupils that attain the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening test is below average.
- Governance is strong and effective. Trustees keep a close check on the outcomes for pupils to ensure that they are improving rapidly. The trust provides high-quality support and training for leaders and staff.
- Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. However, a very small minority of pupils do not attend school regularly enough. Attendance rates are below average but rising.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and at other times such as at break and lunchtime. They get on very well and say that bullying or the use of derogatory language is extremely rare.
- Children in the early years are happy and settled. They make good progress in their learning as the result of appropriate activities which motivate them to learn.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing and mathematics and in reading in particular, by:
  - continuing to accelerate pupils' progress across each key stage, including in the early years
  - ensuring that a greater proportion of pupils have the basic skills and knowledge required to be ready for their next stage of education
  - increasing the challenge in the work for most-able pupils so that a greater proportion achieve above-average standards
  - increasing the proportion of pupils that reach the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening test.
- Increase pupils' attendance and reduce the number of pupils that are persistently absent from school.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Senior leaders are highly ambitious and unrelenting in their pursuit of the best education possible for all pupils. Across the school, expectations of pupils' learning and motivation are very high. These expectations are communicated very well to pupils in their lessons through the way adults direct and encourage them.
- Accurate self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses guides leaders on what to improve. Pupils are making good and rapid progress due to effective improvements in teaching strategies and in the curriculum.
- Support and challenge from the Harmony Trust are highly effective, as shown by clear improvements in the quality of teaching and in pupils' outcomes. Systems to establish the needs of the various stakeholders are very effective, such as the staff, parent and pupil forums which are attended by the chief executive.
- Staff benefit from regular and appropriate training. Comments from staff and the responses to staff questionnaires show that they appreciate and value this support. Recent training included a focus on mathematics and the teaching of phonics and reading. Better-quality work in pupils' books shows the positive impact of these improvements to the quality of teaching.
- Leaders at all levels share the principal's vision for school improvement. They know what needs to be done and are committed to ensuring that pupils achieve well. The school's values 'believe, achieve, succeed' are evident in the activities in each class. A culture of ambition and success is palpable. Pupils spoke to inspectors about how they attempt challenging work with confidence and are not put off if they cannot do something. Leaders and staff have instilled in pupils a sense of confidence and determination.
- Clear targets are set for teachers and for leaders at all levels. Regular checks hold them to account well and their performance is carefully measured. This ensures that the quality of teaching is consistently good across the school.
- The school's work to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain is good. Pupils spoke confidently to inspectors about British values and what they mean. Mutual respect and tolerance are part of the school's ethos and culture and leaders ensure that diversity is celebrated. A typical comment from one pupil when asked about the school's ethos was, 'You can be who you are.'
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and teaching within the school day is complemented by educational visits and extra-curricular activities. The extra-curricular sporting activities not only develop pupils' physical skills but also their social skills and teamwork. Pupils say that they enjoy the wider opportunities that the school offers, such as taking part in a performance at a local concert venue in front of the mayor. Pupils told an inspector that the experience gave them greater confidence in themselves. On the second day of the inspection, Year 6 pupils enjoyed meeting an author and described being inspired by her to read and write more.
- The physical education and sports premium funding is spent carefully and the school offers a wide range of sports and activities. Coaching in football has been very

successful, resulting in success in local football events. Pupils understand the elements of a healthy lifestyle and more are now taking part in physical activities. The school doubled the number of competitions in which pupils participated in the last academic year.

- Thorough evaluation of the school's spending of the pupil premium funding ensures that resources are targeted effectively to support the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have identified barriers to pupils' learning and have raised standards for this group. Disadvantaged pupils' progress across the school is good and similar to that of other pupils. Funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used well and these pupils make good progress across the curriculum.
- The school makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through teaching across the curriculum and topics covered in assembly. Pupils are given lots of opportunities for reflection. In an assembly observed by an inspector, pupils made numerous, thoughtful contributions on the theme of self-respect.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governance is highly effective. Trustees know the school well and are resolute in their determination to ensure that pupils achieve well.
- Trustees frequently check on the outcomes for pupils to ensure that the targets they have set for the school are being met. High-quality information about pupils' attainment and progress is provided for them. This is used to evaluate how well the school is performing. Senior leaders are held to account extremely well, as shown by the improvements to pupils' outcomes.
- As well as challenging school leaders, trustees give great support to the school by directing funds and training to bring about further improvement. In partnership with the principal, they evaluate successfully which strategies are enhancing pupils' learning and which will bring about further improvement.
- Trustees keep a close check on how effectively funding is spent, such as the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils and funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Good outcomes for these groups show that funds are spent wisely.
- Trustees are knowledgeable about keeping pupils safe. Recently, they commissioned a highly detailed audit of safeguarding to ensure that statutory duties are met and that procedures are rigorous.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong safeguarding culture achieved through regular training, updates and support for pupils. Those responsible for safeguarding within the Harmony Trust academies meet regularly to share good practice and develop even better systems to support pupils to keep them safe. Safeguarding has a high priority. The recent

safeguarding audit has been used to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's policies and procedures.

- The school works well with other agencies and with parents. Parents say that their children feel safe in school.
- Staff are well trained in safeguarding and are knowledgeable about school procedures. Adults are vigilant, including being aware of signs that pupils may be at risk of extremism and radicalisation.
- A strong focus on respect and being a member of a supportive and caring school community ensures that children flourish and feel safe.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Pupils make good progress across all key stages as the result of good and improving teaching. In 2017, pupils' progress was strongest in mathematics due to highly effective teaching. Senior leaders have reviewed and changed their mathematics curriculum. As a result, pupils understand concepts better and are able to apply their mathematical knowledge to solve problems.
- Teachers plan exciting and interesting lessons and these motivate pupils to learn well. Pupils speak of lessons being 'fun'. Levels of enjoyment and excitement are high, such as seen in key stage 2 French. Pupils were very keen to stand up and act out a song in French with finger puppets while the rest of the class sang the song.
- Teaching is good across the curriculum. Pupils study a variety of topics and develop their skills well in the full range of subjects. Pupils enjoy exploring new topics and finding the answers to their questions. Each topic is introduced with an activity to capture their interest and to pique their curiosity. For example, Year 6 pupils spoke enthusiastically to an inspector about their current topic on Mexico. This was introduced by a session in which they tried a selection of Mexican foods.
- The teaching of phonics is improving and the new scheme and strategies to support pupils in making faster progress are effective. In addition, pupils use their phonics skills to spell words correctly. For example, Year 1 pupils were observed learning about the sound made by 'ee' and then using this knowledge to spell a range of words containing this sound.
- Teachers use assessment information well to plan the next steps in pupils' learning. They check on what pupils know and can do and then plan further challenge to help them make more progress. This is particularly effective for pupils working at broadly average standards, but less so for most-able pupils. In some lessons, most-able pupils could be further challenged in the tasks set for them.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

**Good**

#### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are proud members of this school community. They take pride in their work and

show confidence in their learning. One pupil in key stage 1 was very keen to show an inspector how he had rewritten his sentence because the first time he had forgotten to put spaces between his words. He was very proud of his second attempt. Pupils have a positive 'can do' attitude and do not give up even if they find work challenging.

- Pupils understand how to be successful learners. A strong focus of the school's work on respect is about respecting others' rights to learn, having self-respect and concentrating on doing well at school. Pupils say that they understand the importance of being ready to learn and arriving at school on time.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and happy in school. As well as taking care of pupils' physical safety, school leaders and staff ensure that pupils' emotional well-being is a priority. Staff speak to pupils kindly and offer praise and encouragement to help them to achieve well.
- Pupils show a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. The topic of internet safety is revisited regularly. Pupils understand the different forms of bullying and say that it is extremely rare. Should any bullying occur, they are confident to report it, in the knowledge that it would be dealt with promptly by staff. Pupils say that derogatory language is also extremely rare. A typical comment from one pupil to an inspector was that the principal 'wouldn't put up with it'.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered, as seen by the way they speak to each other and to staff. They hold doors open and take turns well.
- The atmosphere in school is calm and positive. The environment is cheerful with displays that celebrate pupils' work and the activities they engage in. Classrooms and corridors are kept tidy and orderly.
- Pupils work well in class without disruption and if any low-level disruption begins, it is dealt with by staff so learning is not interrupted. Pupils quickly respond to adults when they are asked to stop what they are doing to listen to instructions.
- Pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly. Leaders work strenuously to ensure that pupils attend school every day. Rewards are offered to encourage pupils to attend well. School staff work closely with pupils and families where attendance is of concern. As a result of leaders' work to improve attendance, rates are rising and the number of pupils who are persistently absent is falling. However, the school's attendance percentage is below average and the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent is above average.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- From starting points that are below those typical for most children on entry to school, pupils make good progress across the subjects in the curriculum. Progress is particularly strong in writing and mathematics. The 2016 validated assessment information showed that pupils made progress in writing in key stage 2 that was significantly above average. The 2017 unvalidated assessment results show a further

substantial improvement in progress from key stage 1 to key stage 2 in reading and writing and especially in mathematics.

- The school's own data for the end of key stage 1 in 2017 shows good progress for all groups of pupils from their starting points. In particular, pupils who were working at a below-average level at the end of the Reception Year have made rapid progress and are now working at broadly average standards.
- Pupils make good progress in phonics as the result of effective teaching. However, attainment in phonics is below average. A new strategy for teaching phonics has been in place since last year and, as a result, attainment is rising.
- Progress information shows that there is little difference in the progress rates of different groups, including disadvantaged pupils, those who speak English as an additional language and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. All groups make good progress. Pupil premium funding is spent wisely and disadvantaged pupils receive good support and challenge.
- Although most-able pupils, including most-able disadvantaged pupils, also make good progress, it is not as strong as that made by pupils working at broadly average standards. A smaller proportion of pupils achieve above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics than is the case nationally in all key stages.
- Pupils make good progress across each key stage, but their attainment at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 is below average. This is because there is a legacy of underachievement to be made up. A below-average proportion of pupils have the necessary basic skills to ensure that they are well prepared for their next stage of education. Senior leaders are aware of this and set higher and more ambitious targets year on year. As a result, attainment is rising.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years is good. Leaders ensure that teaching is of good quality and the learning activities for children help them to make good progress. Leaders know the strengths and areas for development and use accurate evaluation of these to bring about an improvement in outcomes for children.
- Children begin school in the early years in either the Nursery or Reception classes. On entry to school they have a level of skills and knowledge which is considerably below that typical for children of their age, particularly in speaking and mathematics. They make good progress, and by the end of the Reception Year almost two thirds reach a good level of development. This proportion is a little below the national figure.
- Children learn well because teachers check carefully what they know and can do already and provide them with opportunities to develop their skills further. Detailed records are used to plan what to teach next. In particular, adults provide many opportunities for children to develop their vocabulary and language skills throughout the school day. An example of this seen by an inspector took place during snack time in the Nursery when the children were encouraged to copy the teacher who talked about the apple being 'crunchy' and 'tasty'.
- The range of activities and resources provided inside and outside is good and children

are well motivated to learn. They concentrate on their activities with interest and sustained attention. One example of this seen by inspectors was a drama session. Children were observed thoroughly enjoying acting out a familiar story, complete with appropriate animal sound effects, which added to their enjoyment.

- Children behave well because leaders and staff have high expectations. An example of this was seen by an inspector in Reception. The adult reminded the children of the class charter, which states that children should respect others' learning. This worked well and they all listened carefully without interrupting.
- Children in the early years are happy and settled. Staff create a happy atmosphere by speaking to children in a kind tone and encouraging them to do their best. Good behaviour and learning are praised and children respond to this very well.
- Staff ensure that children are well cared for and that they are safe. The safeguarding of children in the early years is of high priority.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged children is used very well. The attainment of disadvantaged children is slightly higher than that of other children in the early years.
- Staff ensure that good relationships with parents and carers are developed and maintained. 'Stay and play' sessions are offered to them so they can spend time with their children in class. The school also works closely with other agencies to support children as necessary.

## School details

Unique reference number	141333
Local authority	Oldham
Inspection number	10036590

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	337
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Paul Makin
Principal	Michelle Dickens
Telephone number	0161 260 0622
Website	<a href="http://www.alt.theharmonytrust.org">www.alt.theharmonytrust.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:info@alt.theharmonytrust.org">info@alt.theharmonytrust.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Alt Academy became a sponsor-led academy on 1 October 2014, joining the Harmony Trust.
- The principal took up post in November 2016 and was previously a national leader of education.
- Two assistant principals joined the school at the start of this term, along with two new teachers.
- Formal support is provided to the school through other academies in the Harmony Trust.

- The school met the government's floor standard in 2016, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' achievement in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6.
- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is more than double the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors gathered a range of evidence from the school's documentation, including assessment information relating to pupils' progress and attainment, work in pupils' books and observing in lessons. Documents examined included safeguarding records, the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and school policies.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of lessons, year groups and subjects. Five of these observations were made jointly by inspectors and members of the senior leadership team. In addition, the inspectors observed leaders giving feedback on observations to staff.
- The teaching of phonics and reading was observed and one inspector heard some key stage 1 pupils read.
- Inspectors talked to pupils informally at break and lunchtime while observing their activities. In addition, inspectors talked to two groups of key stage 2 pupils to ascertain their views about the school. Fourteen online questionnaires completed by pupils were considered too. Inspectors also examined the results of a pupil questionnaire provided by the school.
- Meetings were held with representatives from the trust board, including the chair, and three members of the trust's management group, including the chief executive, who provide support and challenge to the school. Meetings were also held with the senior leaders and some subject/department leaders and teachers.
- Inspectors could not take account of parental responses to the online questionnaire Parent View, as there were too few to view. However, inspectors did consider the 128 parental questionnaires provided by the school. One inspector talked to several parents at the start of the school day. In addition, inspectors read the minutes from the parents' forum and the responses from senior leaders to parents' suggestions.
- Inspectors took account of seven questionnaires completed by school staff.

## Inspection team

Andree Coleman, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Kathy Hall	Ofsted Inspector
Doreen Davenport	Ofsted Inspector

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