

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Pleckgate High School

Pleckgate Road, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 8QA

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Inspection dates:

29 and 30 March 2023

## **Outcome**

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Leaders and staff have high expectations for pupils at Pleckgate High School. From their different starting points, pupils usually get the education and support they need to take positive steps towards aspirational goals.

For the most part, pupils benefit from high-quality teaching. Pupils enjoy learning. They achieve well in most subjects. In a small number of subjects, pupils' learning is hampered by teaching that is less well developed.

Pupils appreciate the calm and respectful culture they usually experience. The vast majority of pupils quickly learn and demonstrate the positive behaviours that staff model and teach. A small proportion of pupils struggle to consistently live up to staff's high expectations. Occasionally, these pupils interrupt the positive experiences of others at the school.

Pupils are typically kind to others. Staff are vigilant. They take swift and effective action to deal with bullying and other unpleasant behaviours should they arise.

Pupils feel happy and safe at Pleckgate High School. This is because they feel part of a caring community. Pupils trust staff to support them when they need it.

Many pupils appreciate the breadth of additional opportunities they can get involved in. These pupils are keen to participate in sporting, performance and other activities to develop new skills and support the development of their character.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders, including members of the local governing body, set high standards for staff and pupils at Pleckgate High School. They understand where these standards are realised and where staff and pupils require further support. They ensure that staff are well supported to manage pupils' behaviour effectively and strengthen the education and personal development that pupils receive.

Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a suitably broad and balanced curriculum. Many pupils take advantage of an ambitious range of subjects to support their aspirations.

Subject curriculums are expertly designed to ensure rigorous and well-organised coverage of subject content. Leaders carefully specify the important knowledge that pupils should learn in the subjects they study.

Many teachers have well-developed subject knowledge. They use this to present, explain and model learning highly effectively. These teachers design and use suitably demanding activities, which helps pupils to know, remember and use important knowledge. However, the strength of teachers' subject knowledge varies within a small number of subjects. In these cases, this affects how well some teachers present and explain subject matter.

In the main, teachers' use of assessment strategies in lessons, and over time, is well focused and effective. This provides many teachers and pupils with a clear understanding of what pupils know, remember and can do. In a minority of subjects, assessment strategies are not used as well they could be. In these cases, teachers are not as well informed about what pupils know and remember.

The majority of pupils consistently show positive attitudes to their learning. Staff are prompt to address occasional disruptions to learning when they do occur.

Leaders make use of a breadth of information to identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers use this information to adapt activities and provide the right environment for these pupils to learn well in lessons. Beyond lessons, experienced staff provide additional enhanced support for pupils with more complex or specific needs.

For the most part, pupils, including those from less advantaged backgrounds and those with SEND, know and remember more in the subjects they study. This helps them to progress through the curriculum and attain well in most of the qualifications they take.

Leaders make strong and frequent use of well-designed assessments to carefully identify specific weaknesses in pupils' reading. They provide carefully matched support to pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning to read and those who speak English as an additional language. These pupils successfully acquire the knowledge they need to read. This helps them to confidently access subject content in lessons.

Appropriately trained staff provide a suitably broad personal, social, health and economic education to all pupils. Staff deliver a well-ordered programme of careers education,

information, advice and guidance to pupils across all year groups. Pupils appreciate and can recall important knowledge from these personal development opportunities.

Staff provide a broad range of additional opportunities to promote the wider development of pupils, including those with SEND. These are thoughtfully designed around pupils' commitments outside of school. However, leaders have identified that pupils' participation in these opportunities is mixed. They have suitable plans to better track, review and promote pupils' engagement in the wider life of the school.

Leaders demonstrate a deep commitment to engaging with and supporting staff. They ensure staff have a range of opportunities to share their experiences about well-being and workload. Leaders take positive action to support staff in these and other areas. Staff appreciate what leaders do to understand and support their professional and personal circumstances.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff know individual pupils well. They understand the risk that pupils may face in their lives. They ensure that pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe.

Staff are well trained to spot concerns about pupils. They are vigilant to these. They diligently report concerns to leaders.

Leaders carefully assess concerns about pupils' safety. They provide well-matched support, which is skilfully focused on pupils immediate and longer-term needs. They regularly review and adapt support to provide responsive care to pupils who need it.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In a small number of subjects, the subject knowledge of some staff is variable. In these subjects, staff do not always deliver subject content as clearly as they should. This affects the learning of some pupils in these subjects. Leaders should ensure that all staff are confidently equipped with the knowledge they need to deliver the subjects they teach effectively.
- In a minority of subjects, staff do not use assessment strategies consistently well. In these subjects, staff do not identify what pupils know and remember in lessons as well as they should. In other cases, assessments do not help staff to clearly identify what pupils know and remember over time. Leaders should ensure that all staff know how to make effective use of assessment strategies to identify what pupils know and remember in all subjects.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually, this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in January 2019.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	142088
<b>Local authority</b>	Blackburn with Darwen
<b>Inspection number</b>	10265455
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,337
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Ian Brown
<b>Headteacher</b>	Aishling McGinty
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.pleckgate.com">www.pleckgate.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	29 and 30 January 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Pleckgate High School is part of the Education Partnership Trust.
- The school makes use of two alternative providers to provide full-time education for a small number of pupils.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They met with representatives of the academy trust, local governing body and Blackburn with Darwen local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's records of safeguarding checks and referrals. They met with leaders who have overall responsibility for safeguarding. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils about the school's work to keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders responsible for SEND and reading. They also looked at information about the support for pupils with additional needs.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class and around the school site. They also scrutinised behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils from all year groups and considered the responses of the pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff and considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Parent View, including the comments received by Ofsted's free-text facility. Inspectors also considered the views of parents who contacted them during the inspection.

## **Inspection team**

Michael Pennington, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alexia Gargrave

Ofsted Inspector

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