

Pleckgate High School

Pleckgate Road, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 8QA

Inspection dates

29 to 30 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The community of Pleckgate has a local secondary school it can be proud of. It provides an excellent education for all its pupils. They flourish in a bright, positive and secure environment.
- Leaders and teachers have carefully developed a culture where pupils are both inspired by their work and enjoy it. There is a great sense of industry and endeavour around the school. Pupils are evidently happy and feel valued.
- Rapid improvement of this school has been driven by the trust, governors and the inspiring headteacher. There has been an unrelenting focus on school improvement.
- Excellent leadership skills and responsibilities to improve the school are spread across all staff.
- A high-quality curriculum, outstanding teaching, learning and personal development provide pupils with an excellent preparation for the next stages in their lives.
- Pupils make excellent progress throughout year groups and in most subjects. The achievement of pupils in mathematics has been very strong for many years. However, the very high expectations that teachers generally have of what their pupils can achieve are not reflected in the standards of work in computer science and some aspects of technology.
- Highly effective additional support and guidance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), for those pupils who need to catch up in Year 7, for disadvantaged pupils, and for those who are new to learning English ensure that they too progress very well.
- Staff actions to promote pupils' physical and emotional health are outstanding. Pupils feel very well looked after and trust staff to take care of them.
- The school has taken considerable and successful action to give pupils the skills and attitudes they need to look after themselves. In addition, pupils are at the forefront of the school's work to ensure that all are healthy, safe and feel secure.
- Pupils are principled and have high levels of self-respect. Pupils now lead on setting and expecting high standards of behaviour. Systems to help pupils behave are highly effective.
- Pupils attend very well because they know the value of the high-quality education they receive.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers of technology subjects and computer science have as high expectations about what their pupils can achieve as teachers have in other subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Three years ago, as the school opened as an academy, staff morale was very low. Pupils' learning was generally weak. Outstanding leadership by the trust, governors and the new headteacher has transformed the culture of the school. Pupils are now very keen to attend because they feel secure, are happy and they know they are learning very well. Pupils and staff work as a team with a common goal: to excel.
- The school's reputation within the community has soared. Applications to join Year 7 in September are considerably oversubscribed, whereas, three years ago, the school was only admitting about two thirds of the published admission number.
- Since the school became an academy, the personnel in the school's wider senior leadership team have not changed significantly. This layer of leadership, however, has changed radically in terms of the impact it has on improving the pupils' learning and personal development. Leaders of subjects and those with pastoral responsibilities are now excelling in the contributions they make to pupils' lives.
- All leaders are now very clear about their roles and responsibilities. They believe they have the support they need to match what is expected of them. They follow the lead set by the headteacher in ensuring that every decision made is based on what is best for the pupils of Pleckgate High School.
- When older pupils were asked about their experience of their school, they said consistently that it is now so much better. When asked why, again their answers were unequivocal: 'Mr Cocker'.
- Teachers are provided with accurate feedback on the effectiveness of their work. All teachers are helped to improve, and professional development is at the heart of the school's improvement. In addition to training to enhance teachers' understanding of their subject, examination requirements and teaching skills, teachers undertake training to develop as leaders. All staff are encouraged and supported to develop personally and to have good physical and mental health.
- Individual teachers believe that their role is critical to school improvement and that they are now enabled to flourish. The headteacher has successfully begun to strip away tasks from teachers that were not being productive, allowing teachers to concentrate on planning, teaching, assessing and reflecting.
- The outstanding promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development goes hand in hand with their academic achievements. Pupils' excellent personal development contributes significantly to their highly positive attitudes to learning. School leaders have skilfully developed a culture and ethos that enable pupils to feel safe, secure, grow emotionally and have belief in themselves.
- Pupils participate in an extensive range of enriching activities. These include regular activities and 'one off' events. Pupils seek to be part of the local youth parliament after being part of a successful school council and school leadership team. Pupils work with charities and are currently supporting local food banks. There are frequent performing arts activities. Sport features highly. The school works with youth groups to broaden pupils' understanding of their work and how to make positive contributions to it. For

example, using Anne Frank's life and diary as a starting point, visiting youth workers develop pupils' knowledge, skills and confidence to challenge all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

- Leaders at all levels and teachers have a very open approach to learning from other professionals, including experts from beyond the trust. Staff have used the information, advice and guidance intelligently, and this contributes to the school's rapid improvement.
- Leaders are building strong and effective partnerships with the community. The school is constantly striving to improve communications with parents and to involve them in their children's education. The school recognises this is an ongoing and long-term development. The school provides parents with clear, high-quality reports on how their children are performing. It is developing systems to exploit the opportunities that the internet and social media offer to provide virtually instant communication between parents and the school.
- All pupils have a school tablet which they use in classes and take home. Leaders have established very clear protocols on the use of school tablets and indeed the use of pupils' mobile phones while on site. Teachers ensure that pupils use modern technology when it is appropriate to do so. They enable pupils to prepare for working with modern technologies without compromising the development of their basic skills in communication, reading and numeracy.
- Pupils are very well aware of the dangers that exist through the use of social media, and they know how to stay safe. The school is also conscious that some pupils may need to limit time spent on tablets and so closes their internet access every night. The school employs sophisticated monitoring systems that alert managers if it appears that any pupil may be trying to access unsuitable material. These are always promptly investigated and there is almost always an understandable explanation. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to raise any concerns that they may have about themselves, or the welfare of others, through the use of electronic communication.
- A priority for the school, since it opened as an academy, has been to review and adapt the curriculum to promote high standards. The leadership team has shown integrity in not narrowing the curriculum or compromising on ambition simply to improve the school's headline results. For example, despite a much smaller-than-average proportion of pupils starting the academy with high levels of prior attainment, around half of all pupils study science as three separate subjects, and they do so successfully.
- The school receives additional funding to enhance provision for a variety of groups of pupils. These include pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and those Year 7 pupils who need to catch up. In all cases, these funds are very well managed and are making significant contributions to improving the learning, personal development and well-being of these pupils.

Governance of the school

- The local governing body forms an integral part of the highly effective leadership structure of the school. By normal standards, it is a small governing body, but it is very efficient. There is clarity about where governors sit in the chain of accountability. They have skilfully held the headteacher to account for school improvement, knowing when

to support him and when to challenge him.

- Governors accurately describe the improvements the school has made and fully understand what has driven these. They also know about those aspects of the school that have not improved quite as quickly as the rest. Governors diligently ensure that systems to manage the school's finances and safeguarding are robust.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have created a culture where pupils are at the forefront of ensuring that the school provides a safe environment in which to learn. Pleckgate High School pupils constantly model a caring disposition for their peers and indeed for everyone they meet. They do this because they believe it is the right way to live their lives. They are also prepared to speak up when they see injustice or think something is wrong. This culture is backed up with considerable staff expertise and highly effective procedures.
- Every opportunity is taken to promote safety through teaching pupils how to identify and deal with potential dangers. This includes the use of social media, when pupils are out and about in their communities and when at home.
- The school reviews the effectiveness of safeguarding frequently. Leaders use this information to improve already robust systems.
- Procedures to recruit only suitable persons to new posts and train them are robust and of high quality. All staff are well trained to respond to concerns they may have about a pupil and know how to respond to a pupil disclosing information to them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Leaders have quickly and systematically improved the quality of teaching throughout the school so that, now, it is outstanding.
- Leaders and teachers, generally, know in impressive detail what pupils have learned in their primary school and how well they have learned it. This enables teachers to teach appropriate topics at precisely the right level. It also enables leaders to organise and implement systems to support those pupils who need additional help to catch up or to learn more effectively. So, in most subjects, pupils learn very well right from the start of Year 7.
- Teachers of computer science do not have a clear enough understanding of the skills and knowledge that their pupils have developed at primary school, however. This results in these teachers setting work that is not challenging enough for the pupils they are teaching. In this subject, pupils are not achieving as well as they could. Achievement in some aspects of technology is also restricted because the more able pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to excel.
- The teaching of mathematics has been very strong for a considerable length of time. Despite pupils generally starting Pleckgate High School with low standards in mathematics, they make excellent progress and, by the time they leave in Year 11, have more than caught up. Teachers are well qualified and bring a range of experience. Teachers set their sights very high when planning learning. Indeed, they

often encourage pupils in key stage 4 to work on some aspects of the A-level curriculum.

- Throughout the school, relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Teachers prepare activities that are enjoyable. Teachers are confident and do not mind if they occasionally get something wrong and learning falters. They are adept at sensing when pupils begin to develop minor misconceptions, and they quickly adapt to ensure that pupils remain fully engaged and learning.
- All teachers know they have a responsibility for improving the low literacy and numeracy standards that pupils tend to have when they start in this school. Teachers collaborate about how best they can, within their subject, help pupils improve their basic skills. This has a significantly positive impact on pupils' progress in those areas.
- Leaders have produced very clear policies on homework and on the feedback that teachers are expected to give pupils on the quality of their work. Teachers typically carefully follow the school's marking policy and, when they do, pupils benefit from their valuable feedback.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school takes its work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare very seriously, and it is outstanding.
- The school seeks to provide an extensive range of opportunities for all pupils to grow spiritually, socially, morally and culturally. It also provides extensive opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills. As a result, younger pupils see excellent role models in their older peers.
- Complex issues that confront young people are highlighted and discussed throughout the school and extensively throughout the school's excellent religious education curriculum. Pupils are expected to think deeply about their beliefs and express them. Topics including extremism, a person's sexual identity and social justice are discussed maturely.
- Some pupils are trained to support others to improve their mental health and their resilience when experiencing difficulties. The school's 'empathy room' is managed by pupils. This is a place where pupils can find calm, where there are people to listen to them, and where there is an opportunity to seek advice and support. Whole-year group days are organised that enable pupils to reflect on what they think of themselves, and then how to bring about positive change in their lives.
- The few pupils that attend alternative provision do so with the intention of them returning to full-time education at Pleckgate High School. The school works closely with these providers, monitoring pupils' progress, welfare and personal development. These pupils benefit considerably from this highly specialised support.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pleckgate High School pupils are proud of their school and are keen to tell you all about it. They recognise the opportunities that they have to learn and develop. They are enthusiastic to engage with the extensive range of activities available to them. Pupils' appreciation of the quality of education is reflected in their above-average attendance. This is particularly significant as the school has a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils who, nationally, tend not to attend as well as other pupils.
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are highly positive and this makes a considerable contribution to high levels of achievement. Interruptions to learning are extremely rare and, when they do happen, are condemned by other pupils.
- This is a very harmonious school. Relationships between pupils from different cultural and social backgrounds are excellent. Similarly, relationships between adults and pupils are almost exclusively positive. However, there is a very small number of Year 8 boys who do not meet the high standards displayed by the rest because they are not always respectful to all adults.
- When pupils return from an absence of more than a few days, they take part in an excellent catch-up programme in which they are given dedicated time and support to make up work that they would have missed. This helps pupils maintain their high levels of achievement.
- All staff, and particularly school leaders, work skilfully to help those pupils who find it difficult to behave to learn how to understand themselves and to control their emotions. There are many different forms of support for these pupils. No pupil has been permanently excluded from the school since it became an academy. The use of temporary exclusions is well below the national average and is decreasing.
- A key and powerful element to attaining such high standards of behaviour is the enthusiasm that pupils have to be at the forefront of behaviour management. Many pupils are trained in a wide variety of support groups. Anti-bullying is led by the pupil body and mainly through anti-bullying ambassadors. Police have worked with the school to help train some pupils to lead on restorative justice programmes.
- High standards of behaviour are achieved because pupils have very high moral standards. They want their school to be a positive place to work in, and pupils take effective steps to ensure that behaviour, generally, is excellent.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils joining Pleckgate High School usually do so with standards in reading, literacy and numeracy that are significantly lower than average. As the quality of teaching has improved in Pleckgate, so has the progress made by pupils. In 2017, pupils leaving Year 11 made much higher than average progress, and they had caught up with standards nationally. Headline figures for the progress that leavers made in 2018 appear to be less strong. However, deeper scrutiny of the performance of various pupil ability groupings shows that most pupils achieved well and that the very large number

of previously low-attaining pupils made much better progress than their peers nationally. However, physical education and technology did not respond as quickly as other departments to the new, reformed qualifications, resulting in weaker than usual progress in 2018.

- The school's assessment information and pupils' work confirm that throughout different year groups, and across a broad range of subjects, the progress made by pupils currently in the school is outstanding.
- Despite starting with weak mathematical understanding when joining Year 7, pupils currently in Year 11 are displaying mathematical standards much higher than seen nationally, demonstrating very high levels of progress. Pupils' achievement in mathematics has been for many years very strong, and rightly continues to be a flagship for the school.
- Pupils make strong progress in most other subjects, and particularly so in English and history. Progress in science is improving quickly. Progress overall is as strong in Year 7, and across the whole of key stage 3, as it is in key stage 4.
- Leaders are knowledgeable about the needs of individual pupils with SEND. They are able to identify exactly what support these pupils need, and they communicate this to subject specialists. Teachers and teaching assistants adapt activities and support so that the pupils with SEND make at least as strong progress as other pupils in the school, and sometimes stronger.
- Approaches similar to those adopted to support pupils with SEND are applied to those pupils who need to catch up in Year 7, to disadvantaged pupils and to any pupils who are new to learning English. Highly effective leaders provide teachers with specific and accurate guidance on how to help these pupils. Teachers match leaders' very high expectations of what these pupils can achieve. As a result, there are little or no discrepancies between groups of pupils. Nor are there any significant differences between the achievement of boys and girls.
- Pupils at Pleckgate High School are extremely well prepared for their next stages in education or training. Their positive and successful experiences of learning have given them an eagerness to continue with their studies. Teachers systematically build pupils' independent learning skills by developing their resilience when faced with difficulties. Pupils are encouraged to be inquisitive and are prepared to question things they do not understand or might disagree with. They use modern technologies well to support their own learning. Pupils have very principled approaches to life and learning. They generally show respect for others and are confident and ambitious. Pupils are well informed about the opportunities that exist for them beyond school and how to achieve their ambitions. Almost all pupils in 2018 went on to further their learning on courses that match their aspirations.

School details

Unique reference number	142088
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10057904

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

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1065
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Desmond Callaghan
Headteacher	Mark Cocker
Telephone number	01254 249 134
Website	www.pleckgate.com
Email address	info@pleckgate.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to an academy in February 2016 and became part of the Education Partnership Trust. At that time, the predecessor school required improvement to be a good school. Prior to that, the predecessor school had required special measures.
- The Education Partnership Trust receives government funding for the school. It is ultimately accountable for the school's performance. The trust also provides the school with central services, including human resources management, financial management, marketing, health and safety and website support. The trust delegates some responsibilities to the local governing body, including monitoring the performance of the headteacher.
- The current headteacher took up post in the predecessor school one month before it converted to an academy. With one exception, the current leadership team were in post at the time of academy conversion. About one third of the teaching staff are new

to the academy.

- A much larger proportion of pupils than average speak English as an additional language. A larger-than-average proportion of pupils are disadvantaged.
- As an alternative to Pleckgate High School, a small number of its pupils currently attend The Heights, Blackburn. In addition, a very small number are tutored at home.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders and managers. The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body, one of whom is also the chair. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the Education Partnership Trust.
- Inspectors met with three groups of pupils. They also talked to and observed pupils during their social times.
- Inspectors met with two groups of teachers and also spoke to individual teachers.
- School documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding checks and information about pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. Inspectors considered the school's records of checks on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors visited classrooms, sometimes with leaders, to speak with pupils, look at their work and observe their learning.
- The headteacher and other senior leaders were party to many of the inspection activities.
- Ofsted received 11 communications from parents by text. These, and 65 parental responses to Parent View, were taken into account by inspectors. Inspectors also considered the views of 71 members of staff and 127 pupils who submitted their views through an inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Neil Mackenzie, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dawn Farrent	Ofsted Inspector
Dympna Woods	Ofsted Inspector
Colin Bell	Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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