

Inspection of Darwen Aldridge Community Academy

Sudell Road, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 3HD

Inspection dates:	20 and 21 May 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Claire Bailey. This school is part of the Aldridge Education Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Jane Fletcher, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Rupert Nichols.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a welcoming school, where pupils feel safe. Staff build positive relationships with pupils. The school is a tolerant community in which differences between people are respected. Pupils who are new to the school are well supported and helped to settle in quickly.

Most pupils behave well. Their behaviour around school is mainly calm, and there is an orderly environment. Many pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Students in the sixth form work hard and are exemplary role models for younger pupils. They support younger pupils with reading.

The school has high expectations of what pupils can achieve. The curriculum has been improved, and pupils learn increasingly well. However, inconsistencies in the delivery of the curriculum mean that some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not achieve as well as they should. Students in the sixth form, benefit from a well-designed and delivered curriculum. They achieve well.

Pupils' aspirations are raised through employer visits and visit to universities. They are encouraged to develop their talents in a variety of areas, such as in music and sports, including football and netball. They enjoy contributing to local community events and raise money for charity. Pupils have the opportunity to participate in a range of visits and trips, including a ski trip overseas.

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

Since the last inspection, leaders from the school and the trust have taken effective steps to improve many aspects of the school's provision. This includes pupils' attendance and behaviour and some aspects of the quality of education, such as reading. Pupils who struggle to read receive appropriate support from well-trained staff to catch up. Pupils also benefit from regular opportunities to read for pleasure in school. This helps them to develop their confidence and fluency in reading. However, some actions to improve the quality of education need more time to embed.

The school has a broad and ambitious curriculum. It has reviewed and improved the design of many subject curriculums. Most subject curriculums identify the knowledge that pupils are expected to learn and the order in which it needs to be taught. However, some of these curriculums have been designed more recently, while others are at a more developed stage. This means that sometimes pupils do not acquire knowledge and skills in some subjects as well as they could. This hinders the learning of some pupils. In addition, some of these revised curriculums are still in the early stages of implementation and so are not as effective as they should be.

In the main, staff have secure subject knowledge which they use to explain new content clearly. The school quickly and accurately identifies the needs of pupils with SEND. However, there are occasions when some staff do not choose appropriate activities in

order to support pupils' successful learning of the curriculum. As a result, some pupils, including those with SEND, do not achieve as well as they should.

The school has recently strengthened its arrangements for checking pupils' learning. However, some staff do not use these strategies consistently well to identify gaps in knowledge or to address pupils' errors and misconceptions. This is particularly the case in key stage 4. This means that some pupils do not build on their prior learning as well as they should.

The school has broadened the range of subjects which students in the sixth form can follow. In the sixth form, subject curriculums are delivered consistently. Staff check learning rigorously to ensure that students build on prior learning effectively. Students also have their needs met more effectively. They achieve well across a range of academic and vocational subjects.

The school has raised expectations of pupils' behaviour. Most pupils follow the school's clear routines when in class and around the school. Pupils' behaviour improves over time. The school has effective strategies in place to support pupils who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour. The school also employs a range of effective strategies to address pupils' absence. Overall, pupils' attendance is improving. The school recognises that improving the attendance of some pupils who have barriers to learning remains a key priority. Sixth-form students attend more regularly.

Pupils and students benefit from a carefully designed personal development programme. They appreciate the opportunity to learn about finance and how to build healthy relationships. Pupils and students learn about citizenship and different religions. They receive targeted support for their mental health and well-being, which they value greatly. They receive helpful careers advice and value the opportunities to engage with employers as well as to complete work experience placements. These prepare them well for their next steps in education, employment and training.

Most staff feel that the school is considerate of their well-being and workload. Staff are positive about the support that they receive to develop and hone their practice. The school is taking effective action to strengthen and develop the leadership of some subject areas. The CEO, local governors and trustees take an active interest in the school and challenge and support the school diligently.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some subject curriculums are not fully embedded. This means that some pupils are still catching up and have not been able to build new knowledge successfully. The school

should ensure that the curriculum is consistently strong across subjects so that pupils achieve well across the curriculum.

- Some staff do not design appropriate activities for pupils, including for those with SEND, sufficiently well. This means that pupils sometimes do not learn the curriculum as successfully as they should. The school should ensure that staff receive appropriate guidance to design learning activities so that pupils achieve well across the curriculum.
- Some staff do not use the school's assessment strategies well enough to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and misconceptions, particularly in key stage 4. This hampers pupils from building and remembering knowledge securely. The school should ensure that staff consistently use assessment strategies to address gaps in learning so that pupils embed their knowledge well over time.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked-after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	135580
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10377993
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,073
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	125
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Rupert Nichols
CEO of the trust	Jane Fletcher
Principal	Claire Bailey
Website	www.daca.uk.com
Dates of previous inspection	14 and 15 December 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes in leadership and staffing at the school. In addition, the trust has recently established a shared sixth-form offer between this school and two other local schools in the trust.
- The school currently uses two registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth-form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive principal in the absence of the headteacher, other school leaders, members of staff and the school improvement partner of the trust. The inspectors spoke with the CEO, other trust leaders and members of the trust board and local governing committee. They also spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors spoke with representatives of alternative providers that the school uses.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history, modern foreign languages and physical education. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects. They looked at samples of pupils' work in these subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experiences in school and their views on behaviour and bullying. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes. Inspectors also took account of the views expressed by pupils in Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. An inspector had telephone conversations with some parents at their request.

Inspection team

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