

The Valley Leadership Academy

Address: Fearn Moss, Bacup, Lancashire, OL13 0TG

Unique reference number (URN): 147018

Inspection report: 21 April 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders' commitment to supporting pupils with barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing is noteworthy. They identify and assess pupils' needs, including those who are disadvantaged and those who are known to social care, in a timely manner. Leaders have recently increased the range of strategies on offer to help reduce pupils' obstacles to success. For example, the foundation sets help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to successfully access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. This is beginning to help these pupils to gain secure knowledge and skills.

Leaders work productively with a wide range of external professionals to ensure that pupils get the support that they need. They make effective use of alternative provision. Leaders have also invested in mental health support, counselling and smaller class sizes. This is helping those pupils who struggle with the regular structure of the school day, or who find attending school difficult, to keep up with their academic studies.

Leaders make wise decisions about the use of the pupil premium funding to reduce barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. For example, they have a sharp focus on improving the attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils so that they are in school and ready to learn.

Leaders ensure that staff are suitably equipped to help pupils who face challenges to learning to succeed.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders, including those responsible for governance, have brought about much positive change since the previous inspection. For example, pupils' behaviour has improved, the needs of those who face barriers to learning are better met and pupils' achievement is beginning to improve due to the changes to the curriculum. The trust has appointed a new senior leadership team in the last 2 years to strengthen and hasten the pace of improvements. Leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses within the school. Their realistic insight means that they have identified the right areas on which to focus. Consequently, leaders have ensured that there is a firm foundation on which to secure further improvement.

Leaders make sure that staff access a comprehensive programme of professional learning so that they can deliver the curriculum. Improvements to leaders' checks on teaching mean they are better placed to identify where further support is needed to eradicate variability. Staff appreciate the support that they receive and the opportunities to work together collaboratively. They value leaders' consideration of their workload and wellbeing.

The trust and members of the local governing body fulfil their statutory duties diligently. They check on the impact of leaders' actions and offer suitable challenge to aid leaders in their quest for further improvement.

Leaders are building positive relationships with parents and carers. This partnership work is strengthening the support that pupils receive to overcome barriers to their learning and/or

wellbeing.

Leaders care deeply about the school. They work with the very best interests of the pupils at the heart of all that they do.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have thought carefully about what pupils need to learn in order to become positive citizens of the future. The programme to support pupils' personal development is shaped well to take account of the local context and the wider world. Leaders make sure that all pupils, regardless of their barriers to learning, are able to access this programme in its entirety. For example, teachers adapt their teaching to make sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are as well equipped for life beyond school as their peers.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves healthy. For example, they attend the 'Valley Vitality Day' where they work with health and wellbeing professionals to understand how to safeguard their mental and physical health.

Leaders ensure that all aspects of relationships and sex education are covered in an age-appropriate way. As such, pupils know about important ideas such as consent and healthy relationships. Leaders ensure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe when working and playing online as well as when they are out in the community.

Leaders ensure that pupils develop a sense of what is right and wrong. Pupils learn about fundamental British values, such as tolerance, democracy and the rule of law. This helps them to understand diversity within society and the need to respect the differences between themselves and others.

Leaders have strengthened the pastoral support that pupils receive. There are a range of professionals who work with pupils when needed. In addition, the 'mini-school' strategy ensures that each year group develops a close link with key staff. This means that pupils have a trusted adult in school who they can turn to if, or when, they need help.

Leaders offer work experience placements to pupils in Year 10 and weekly careers information drop-in sessions for other year groups. Consequently, pupils are suitably informed about the choices that they can make for life once they leave Year 11.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' attainment, by the end of Year 11, is below the national average. This is also true for disadvantaged pupils. In the past, pupils have not been as well prepared as they should be for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Improvements to the curriculum mean that the achievement of current pupils is improving. This is helping some pupils, especially those in key stage 3 to gain the knowledge that they should across a broad range of subjects, including English and mathematics. These pupils are gaining stronger foundations for future success. A renewed approach to helping pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities overcome their barriers to learning is helping these pupils to move towards their individual goals. However, older pupils, who have not benefited from leaders' new approach, continue to have gaps in their learning, especially in their ability to write fluently and accurately. This hinders their academic success.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention ●

Pupils' rates of attendance remain stubbornly low. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders continue to revise their plans to improve attendance. They think creatively to support those who find it difficult to attend school regularly. For example, they use specialist spaces in school to help pupils to start their day in a calm way. Smaller class sizes and access to support services help pupils to feel more comfortable to come to school. These strategies have had some positive impact on pupils' attendance rates. However, some of this work is at an early stage of development. As such, many pupils continue to miss out on all that the school has to offer.

Leaders have established a calm atmosphere in school. Leaders have ensured that pupils know what is expected of them in terms of their behaviour. In the main, pupils follow the school rules. When pupils' behaviour falls short of leaders' expectations, incidents are dealt with quickly and without fuss. Those pupils who find managing their emotions difficult receive suitable support to help them to calm down and re-engage with their learning. As a result, incidents of disruptive behaviour are declining and suspensions from school are reducing. Bullying, discrimination and harassment are rare. When they do happen, leaders respond in a systematic and suitable way.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention ●

The curriculum is broad and ambitious. It is ordered logically to enable pupils to deepen their knowledge over time. However, the way in which the curriculum is taught varies between classes and subjects.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They use this well to shape learning that allows pupils to build on what they already know. However, some teachers do not check what pupils know well enough. At times, teachers move learning on too quickly before making sure that pupils' understanding is secure. Some teachers do not pick up on misconceptions swiftly enough or resolve gaps in learning. Teachers are beginning to be more successful in adapting their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with barriers to learning, including those pupils with special educational needs.

Reading has a high profile across subjects. Leaders ensure that there are appropriate support strategies for those pupils who find reading difficult. However, their work to close gaps in pupils' basic writing knowledge, such as spelling, grammar and punctuation, is at an earlier stage of development.

Leaders have a secure oversight of the curriculum and the manner in which it is delivered. As such, they know what is working well and are taking appropriate action to reduce the unevenness of teaching across the school.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are greeted warmly by staff when they arrive at school. This gets each day off to a positive start. Pupils are, in the main, happy at school. They enjoy positive relationships with each other and with staff. Pupils know they can be themselves, free from discrimination and intolerance. They are clear that everyone is welcome in their school. This includes those who are new to school. These pupils are buddied up with a peer who helps them to settle in quickly.

Pupils feel safe at school. They report that incidents of bullying are rare. When they do happen, pupils know that leaders and staff will resolve such incidents quickly. Pupils know the school rules and most live up to leaders' expectations for their behaviour. As such, the school is typically a calm and purposeful environment. Although there are signs of improvement, many pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not attend school often enough.

Pupils enjoy the number of sporting clubs that are on offer. They wear their leadership badges with pride. During social times, pupils enjoy playing chess and card games, interacting positively with each other. Pupils appreciate the time that they get to spend with their friends. Regardless of their barriers to learning, or their needs, all pupils are included fully in the day-to-day life of school.

Pupils benefit from leaders' increasingly creative strategies to help them overcome their barriers to learning. For example, some pupils spend time in the 'pioneer' or 'amp it up' centres to receive the support that they need to access the curriculum.

Improvements to the curriculum mean that some pupils are achieving better than they did in the past. Even so, over time, pupils have not been prepared well enough for the next stage in education. Some pupils, especially older pupils, continue to have gaps in their learning which hinder their progress through the curriculum.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff are better equipped to spot and then resolve the gaps in pupils' learning, especially for older pupils, so that they make smooth progress through the curriculum and achieve well.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers address the gaps that some pupils have in their spelling, grammar and punctuation knowledge so that pupils are able to write fluently and accurately across different subject areas.
- Leaders should build on their strategies to tackle absence rates so that more pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and pupils with special educational needs and/or

disabilities, attend school regularly.

About this inspection

This school is part of Star Academies, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Sir Mufti Hamid Patel CBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Kamruddin Kothia OBE DL.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the executive principal and other senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator, during the inspection. The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority. He also spoke with the CEO and the trust's governance professional.

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.

The school currently makes use of 3 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

Executive Principal: Colette Roberts

Lead inspector:

Neil Johnson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Stephen Ruddy, Ofsted Inspector

Alan Hammersley, Ofsted Inspector

Charlotte Oles, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.



This data is from 21 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

589

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,050

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

46.86%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.23%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

22.58%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	30.5%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	32.2%	45.9%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (final)	29.2%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	32.6	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	29.6	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	34.5	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.08	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.01	-0.03	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	22.2%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	25.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	19.4%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	29.3	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	26.6	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	27.1	35.0	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.26	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.23	-0.57	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	22.2%	53.1%	-30.9 pp
2023/24 (final)	25.0%	53.1%	-28.1 pp
2022/23 (final)	19.4%	52.4%	-33.1 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	29.3	50.4	-21.2
2023/24 (final)	26.6	50.0	-23.4
2022/23 (final)	27.1	50.3	-23.2

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.26	0.16	-1.42
2022/23 (final)	-1.23	0.17	-1.39

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	78%	91%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	79%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers (revised)	90%	94%	Not available

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	15.2%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	16.2%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	13.4%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	42.8%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	47.8%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	42.5%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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