

Athena School

South Park, Lincoln, Lincolnshire LN5 8EL

Inspection dates

12–13 December 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school is extremely well led. Since the previous inspection, school leaders have successfully led the school through a period of rapid change. All aspects of the school's work are now at least good and leaders are ambitious for continued improvement.
- The school's curriculum is well designed to broaden pupils' knowledge and skills and to give them a purpose for learning. It makes a significant contribution to pupils' achievement and their spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are exemplary. Staff use a range of highly effective techniques to ensure that pupils are well cared for and kept safe.
- Staff are skilled in managing pupils' behaviour. They provide appropriate support and guidance to help pupils learn how to manage their behaviour in a nurturing environment.
- Governance of the school is strong. Governors know the school well and provide good support and challenge to school leaders. They are determined for all pupils to receive a high-quality education.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar good progress to their peers.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They cooperate well with each other in lessons and conduct themselves well around the school.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points in different subjects. Pupils in key stage 4 are appropriately challenged to gain good examination grades in a variety of subjects and courses.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They receive effective guidance which supports them well in securing places in further education.
- Parents and carers are very positive about the school. They appreciate the nurturing ethos and the supportive staff.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. However, teachers do not sufficiently develop pupils' mathematical problem-solving and reasoning skills to help them deepen their understanding and extend their learning.
- Some staff demonstrate insufficient knowledge of the different subjects taught in the school to support pupils' learning well, particularly in mathematics.
- Persistent absence, although reduced from previous years, remains high.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils more effectively develop their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Maintain the recent improvements in attendance and further develop them by working more closely with parents and pupils to inform them of the importance of good attendance.
- Ensure that all staff have comprehensive subject knowledge, particularly in mathematics, to further enhance pupils' progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- School leaders have set a very clear direction for the school. They demonstrate passion and determination for every pupil to succeed. Leaders work as a strong and highly effective team to embed their vision for excellence across all areas of the school's work.
- Leaders at all levels set high expectations for staff and lead by example. Since the previous inspection, they have rapidly improved the school. They consistently model the way they want staff to interact with pupils. Their close monitoring of pupils' personal development and well-being – as well as their academic achievements – ensures that pupils are well cared for and make good progress in their learning.
- School leaders have a strong, positive presence in the school. They visit classrooms often and know pupils very well. Talking with pupils and thoroughly reviewing pupils' progress with the staff enable leaders to assess what is working well and why. Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas to develop. They continually consider, and refine, the school development strategies to ensure that they are clear about what can be done to improve the school further. For example, leaders accurately identified that improvements to the teaching of science were necessary. Improved resources and ongoing specialist training for staff are rapidly improving teaching and learning in science across the school.
- The school's curriculum provides pupils with motivating learning experiences. There is a broad range of interesting projects and courses to inspire pupils to learn across key stages 3 and 4. Pupils have many opportunities to use and apply their English and mathematics skills in other subjects. A key strength of the curriculum is the way in which it builds pupils' knowledge and develops their skills for a purpose. Projects have a genuine outcome, which pupils share within the school or with the local community. For example, during the inspection, as an outcome of their learning about plastics, pupils worked with a radio station, Lincs FM, to create podcasts to educate the community of Lincolnshire about the impact of plastic on the environment.
- Systems to assess pupils' progress are thorough. Leaders continually analyse and respond to the information staff provide. If pupils make less progress than they should, leaders ensure that appropriate support is quickly provided.
- Leaders have developed comprehensive systems for understanding and managing pupils' behaviour, grounded in research and shared good practice. They have ensured that staff receive high-quality professional development in understanding and managing behaviour, which is linked to pupils' social, emotional and mental-health needs. Incidents of challenging behaviour have reduced over the last year.
- Information from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans is used to inform teaching strategies and identify accurately pupils' personal and academic targets. Leaders allocate support for pupils – particularly pupils looked after – to precisely meet their individual needs. Reviews are carried out in a timely way to reflect pupils' progress and changing circumstances. This is particularly the case for pupils in Year 11, where careful consideration is given to pupils' transition to college.

- School leaders use effectively the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils. These pupils receive additional support designed to raise their achievement, enhance their social and emotional development and improve their attendance. They make progress in line with their peers and their attendance has improved.
- Leaders work collaboratively with the federated primary school and have established effective links with other local schools and with a variety of external agencies. They use these links to check the impact of their actions to improve the school. Leaders also share their expertise to support improvement work across the federation, and with colleagues in other schools.
- Leaders ensure that pupils develop a comprehensive appreciation of British values and of spiritual, moral and cultural issues through the school's curriculum, visits to places of interest and visitors to school. For example, pupils recently experienced a forensic science week, where they had to work together to solve clues using their scientific skills to discover who had committed a crime. Pupils are also challenged to think about the consequences of people's actions through topics based on themes, such as the history of the slave trade. They meet on a regular basis as a group to discuss the consequences of discriminatory behaviour and bullying. Pupils have a good understanding of different faiths and cultures and the impact they have on their own lives.
- Leaders have created a culture where staff feel empowered to be creative and are motivated to do their best to ensure that teaching is strong. Staff – including those new to teaching and new to the school – feel well supported by leaders. They appreciated the coaching and guidance provided by leaders to improve their practice.

Governance of the school

- Governors provide strong governance for the school. They talk astutely about the key areas of the school's performance, including the impact of additional funding, the achievement of pupils and the effectiveness of the curriculum.
- Members of the governing body have an accurate understanding of the actions taken to improve the school. They receive a range of information from leaders so that they are well informed. They check the accuracy of the information they receive through visits to school and regular meetings with leaders, staff and pupils.
- Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the school and to pupils. Governors ensure that they have appropriate skills to strategically monitor and support the effectiveness of the school staff and leaders. Their determination to provide pupils with a safe and aspirational education is realised in the pupils' behaviour, relationships between pupils and staff, and the school's curriculum.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding, where pupils' well-being and safety are predominant. Leaders ensure that necessary employment checks are carried out on the suitability of all staff working in the school.
- Leaders for safeguarding are well informed about safeguarding practices and about the

pupils in the school. Staff receive appropriate and regular safeguarding training and relevant updates. They are alert to signs which may indicate that a pupil may be at risk or vulnerable. Leaders take swift action when concerns are raised.

- Leaders and staff have a good understanding of current safeguarding issues, such as radicalisation and extremism, social media and the misuse of the internet. They ensure that pupils understand the risks posed and take prompt action to protect and support pupils when needed.
- Systems to safeguard pupils are well known by all staff. Leaders keep meticulous records of any incidents that occur and are tenacious in seeking appropriate support for pupils and their families. Records for safeguarding show that leaders work tirelessly to ensure that vulnerable families receive the support they need. Leaders work very effectively with external agencies, when necessary, to ensure pupils' well-being and safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is good. Changes to teaching staff and good-quality training and support have improved the quality of teaching and learning. Where they are less strong, leaders provide skilled guidance and targeted support so that they improve.
- Teachers have high expectations for what pupils can achieve. They plan work that interests and challenges pupils in their learning. For example, inspectors observed a design and technology lesson where pupils had designed key rings to be made out of pewter. The teacher clearly outlined the necessary steps for the key rings to be of a high standard. Pupils followed the steps carefully to ensure a smooth finish to their product.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils well. Relationships between pupils and adults are strong. Staff are sensitive to the needs of individual pupils. Mixed-age nurture groups enable pupils to support each other and build trusting relationships with key adults. Teachers ensure that pupils who are in need of extra support socially, emotionally and academically always have someone to whom they can turn.
- Teachers encourage pupils to review their learning and to look critically at their own work, as well as the work of their peers. Teachers ensure that pupils are specific about their comments so that pupils feel empowered to improve their work and move on in their learning.
- Staff use questions well to consolidate learning, clarify misconceptions and develop pupils' vocabulary. Where questioning was most effective, it encouraged pupils to explain what they were learning and consolidate their understanding. For example, in a key stage 3 science lesson, pupils investigated wind power. The teacher encouraged pupils to think deeply and use comparative language to describe their reasoning. A typical response was 'The longer the blade, the more wind it will catch and the faster the blades will spin.'
- Teachers promote pupils' reading skills well. Pupils read regularly at school. Teachers encourage pupils to read different styles of writing which appeal to their interests. Pupils have frequent opportunities to discuss their understanding of different texts. Pupils recently analysed 'A Christmas Carol' to reflect on the author's use of language

to explain characters' feelings and motives. Pupils highlighted metaphorical language in the text and interpreted the meaning.

- Pupils write for different purposes and across a range of subjects. Teachers are beginning to challenge pupils to write over extended periods of time to practise and embed their skills. Writing is often linked to topics across the curriculum, which inspires pupils to write imaginatively and factually. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' writing showed that pupils present work neatly and their use of spelling, punctuation and grammar is good. They are competent in using paragraphs to structure their writing and use accurately a wide range of punctuation. An example of good punctuation was 'I wanted to scream at them the many questions I had, however, my conscience told me that probably wouldn't end well for me or the others.'
- Teachers plan opportunities for pupils to immerse themselves in a topic of learning and extend their knowledge and skills in different areas of the curriculum. Trips to places of interest and visitors to school enhance pupils' learning and broaden their life experiences. Each topic of learning results in an outcome for pupils. For example, pupils recently created a fitness-training programme for their teachers as part of their 'Get Physical' project.
- Teachers plan mathematics lessons that are well structured. Improvements to the way mathematics is taught have ensured that there is a consistent approach across the school. For example, pupils' mathematical skills in the four rules of number are developed well. Older pupils can convert fractions into percentages and decimals using strategies that have been taught effectively. Nevertheless, although pupils complete problem-solving questions, these skills are not taught consistently well enough to enable pupils to apply effectively their number skills to problem-solve or reason mathematically.
- Typically, teachers demonstrate their good subject knowledge. They plan lessons that motivate and interest pupils in their learning. However, some teachers and teaching assistants do not have a sufficiently thorough knowledge of the subjects they teach to enable pupils to make the best possible progress. This is particularly the case with mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils cooperate well and show caring and compassionate attitudes towards others. Inspectors saw many examples in lessons of pupils listening to each other and working together to solve problems and improve their work. Pupils feel empowered to express their individuality, are respectful and are taught to embrace diversity. For example, pupils have a good understanding of issues around sexuality and discrimination.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are exemplary. Staff know pupils well and are caring and positive. They use a range of effective techniques to keep pupils safe, reassure them and engage them in their learning. Pupils trust staff and feel they are cared for well. Consequently, pupils feel safe, are interested in their learning and are proud of their school. A typical comment was 'This school is the safest place in the

world.'

- The school has a nurturing atmosphere that is highly conducive to learning. Staff provide motivating and attractive learning environments which inspire pupils to learn. Comfortable, well-furnished areas provide pupils with spaces to take time out to reduce their anxieties and calm their behaviour.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Those who spoke with inspectors praised the hard work of staff. Typically, parents thought that staff go 'above and beyond the usual' to support their child's needs. Examples were given of staff supporting parents and pupils by jointly attending appointments and college interviews with them.
- Pupils enjoy responsibility through their elected positions as members of the school council and as e-safety ambassadors. Through these roles, they are involved in decision-making for the school. Ambassadors have received bespoke training from the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Board so they are able to support other pupils in the school to use the internet safely. School council members are in the process of planning to redevelop the school's outside area.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe in a variety of situations, including when using social media. They receive very effective support for their mental health and positive strategies to manage their anxieties and behaviour.
- Pupils are encouraged to develop their independence skills and to work and learn cooperatively. They are well prepared for transition to post-16 education and training by effective careers guidance and the careful planning of school visitors and work experience placements. Highly effective relationships with local colleges enable pupils to settle quickly into the course of their choice.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are respectful to each other, to staff and to visitors. Their behaviour and conduct in lessons and around the school are good.
- Leaders have established highly effective systems to manage pupils' behaviour through successful specialist training for staff. When pupils struggle with their behaviour, staff respond promptly and skilfully to make sure that the behaviour does not disrupt other pupils. Pupils are given time and support to manage their behaviour in a nurturing environment. Pupils and parents speak positively about the improvements in the way the school manages pupils' behaviour and how this has impacted well on pupils' learning and attendance.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They designed their own uniform and wear it with pride. Older pupils set a good example for younger pupils and enjoy supporting them with their learning and with ways to manage their behaviour.
- Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes bullying, including cyber bullying. They say they are confident to talk with staff about any worries they may have and that staff respond quickly and effectively to any incidents.
- A small number of pupils have had fixed-term exclusions. These are used

appropriately. Scrutiny of exclusion records shows that there has been a reduction in the number of exclusions over time and an improvement in these pupils' behaviour.

- Attendance has been below the national average for at least the last three years. This year, attendance has improved to be in line with the national average. Persistent absenteeism, although reducing, remains above the national average. Leaders have raised awareness of the importance of good attendance and the impact on pupils' outcomes. They analyse attendance information closely and work with families and external agencies effectively to encourage pupils to attend school and ensure that pupils are safe. This is having a positive impact on improving attendance. Leaders demonstrate significant improvements for some individual pupils who have previously had very low attendance. Nevertheless, improving attendance remains a high priority for leaders.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils often start the school with skills and knowledge below those of their peers nationally. They make good progress from their individual starting points across different subjects and in their personal development.
- Leaders provide pupils with more challenging courses by the time they enter key stage 4. In 2018, all pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11 achieved GCSE passes in mathematics and the majority achieved GCSE passes in science and English.
- Pupils are challenged to gain qualifications which are necessary for their chosen college courses and interests, as well as for their future careers. For example, in 2018, pupils gained GCSE passes in a range of subjects, including art and design, physical education, geography and history.
- Evidence seen in lessons and pupils' books and information provided by the school indicate that current pupils in key stages 3 and 4 – including those who are disadvantaged – are making good progress across the curriculum.
- The school offers courses to enable pupils to excel. These include computing, cooking and motor vehicle education. All pupils in Year 11 last year achieved a level 1 pass in the preparation for working life course. Leaders provide good-quality impartial advice and effective guidance to pupils to help inform their future career choices. Pupils have meaningful work placements and experiences, which ensure that they are very well equipped for the next stage of their education.
- Preparations for pupils' next stage of education are carefully planned to ensure that pupils are successful. In 2018, all Year 11 pupils gained a place at college. Staff liaise with colleges and external agencies effectively. They work together to provide invaluable support and advice to pupils and their families to ensure that transitions are successful.

School details

Unique reference number	131277
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10041567

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gail Brown
Executive headteacher	Bridget Robson
Telephone number	01522 534 559
Website	www.athenaschool.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@athenaschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 February 2016

Information about this school

- Athena School provides education for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- Pupils in key stage 3 are often taught in mixed-age classes. Pupils throughout the school are sometimes taught in nurture groups.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above that found nationally.
- The school is part of the Fortuna Athena Federation.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all year groups. This included some lessons which were jointly seen with leaders.
- Inspectors observed the teaching of reading and listened to pupils reading. Inspectors talked with pupils about their school and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the assessment leader, the coordinator of the provision for pupils with SEND and several middle leaders. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body and had a telephone conversation with a school improvement partner.
- Inspectors spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day. They took account of the three responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and of six parents who met with inspectors formally during the inspection. There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff, and no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including: the school's self-evaluation of current performance and plans for improvement; the school's most recent information on the achievement and progress of pupils; information relating to the safeguarding of pupils; information about pupils' behaviour management; information relating to the school's use of the pupil premium funding and funding for pupils with SEND; the school's most recent information relating to the attendance of pupils; and minutes from meetings of the governing body.

Inspection team

Stephanie Innes-Taylor, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Martin Finch

Her Majesty's Inspector

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