

The Aylesbury Vale Academy

Paradise Orchard, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP18 0WS

Inspection dates

22–23 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive principal's inspirational leadership has enabled a rapid improvement across all areas of the academy. Despite a series of recruitment and staffing challenges, he has forged a strong team to achieve this.
- Trustees and governors have a clear oversight of the strategic priorities to ensure rapid improvement. They skilfully hold leaders to account for further development.
- The curriculum is in the process of being expanded. More pupils have access to modern foreign languages in key stage 4 and a wider range of courses are planned for key stage 5.
- Outcomes have improved because of strong subject leadership. Staff are committed to training and senior leaders' initiatives.
- Most parents and carers value the work of the school and recognise the improvements. However, a minority expressed concerns about the quality of communication from the school.
- Primary and secondary teachers know their classes very well. Typically, they teach lessons that stimulate pupils' interest and boost their understanding, skills and confidence. However, occasionally some teachers' expectations are not high enough for some groups of pupils.
- Strong leadership and improved provision in early years ensure that children get off to a flying start to their primary education.
- Pupils' reading skills are promoted well. In some subjects, writing, mathematical and communication skills are not as fully developed.
- New systems coupled with new leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has led to improvements. Some teachers' planning requires further refinement to ensure that pupils with SEND make the same progress as their peers.
- The very small cohorts of sixth formers achieve well in the business studies course on offer. Bespoke guidance supports students to progress on to their chosen university courses, employment or apprenticeships. Leaders have plans for a wider range of courses in future.
- After a dip last year, leaders have improved overall attendance. However, not all groups of pupils attend in line with their peers.
- Behaviour and punctuality have significantly improved. There is an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect across the school. Pupils' conduct is calm and orderly, and they generally apply themselves very well to their learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Boost pupil outcomes by ensuring that teachers more consistently:
 - use progress information to ensure that all groups make strong progress from their starting points
 - adapt their teaching to improve the progress of pupils with SEND further in line with best practice in the school.
- Continue to broaden the curriculum through the expansion of modern foreign languages provision and improving the range of courses available in the sixth form, in line with current plans.
- Raise pupils' literacy, mathematical and communication skills by ensuring that:
 - teaching of the wider curriculum in the primary phase is more consistently in line with the best examples in the school
 - continued training and support reduce inconsistencies seen in the teaching and learning in key stages 3 and 4 so all subjects make equally strong progress.
- Ensure that attendance continues to improve so that all groups, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, attend at least in line with the national average.
- Improve communication with parents to equip them with a greater understanding of the support on offer underpinning the progress their children make and the high pastoral care they receive.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The executive principal is a decisive, driven and experienced leader who has wasted no time in forging a skilled leadership team. Aply supported by his vice-principal, he has fostered a culture of high expectations that values each individual pupil while ensuring high levels of pastoral care. Most parents recognise and appreciate the changes at the school. As one parent commented: 'I believe this school has done incredible work to change things.' Another added: 'We can't praise the school more highly... the school is improving and going from strength to strength.'
- Staff morale is high, and they are united in their support of the executive principal and his senior leadership team. All staff with whom inspectors met, and most who responded to the Ofsted survey, think the school is well led and managed. They believe that leaders and governors take staff members' well-being and workload into account and they feel well supported by the school.
- Staff new to the school feel very well supported by their more experienced colleagues and the packages of training and support on offer. As an experienced member of staff who has been at the school for many years was keen to tell inspectors: 'Without doubt, this executive principal and the senior leadership team are the best we have ever had.'
- Senior leaders have successfully implemented aspirational target setting and a common assessment policy across the school. Recently, leaders' improved tracking systems have helped subject and pastoral leaders to sharpen their focus on pupils who need extra help to catch up. Together with regular monitoring of the quality of teaching by leaders, this has significantly improved outcomes across all key stages.
- Leaders ensure that all staff are provided with up-to-date progress information for all pupils in their classes. Teachers are committed to ensuring that all pupils make progress from their starting points and prioritising appropriate support for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Consequently, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have improved and provision for pupils with SEND is getting better.
- The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used well. Leaders have identified the factors that hinder the progress of these pupils. Disadvantaged pupils are supported through a range of academic, creative and cultural activities that raise the expectations they have of themselves. Across the key stages, disadvantaged pupils are currently making strong progress in line with their peers.
- Effective planning ensures that the sports premium funding and additional Year 7 catch-up funding are used effectively. Focused teaching is having a positive impact on improving pupils' literacy and increasing their participation in sports and physical exercise.
- Although many middle leaders are new to their roles, comprehensive induction and training programmes offered by senior leaders and the link advisor ensure that they very quickly establish themselves in their posts. Staff understand the plans for school improvement and work well together as a team towards meeting key priorities.
- Leaders have recently enhanced provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the school. Secondary pupils develop a deep understanding of

fundamental British values, such as tolerance and democracy, through interesting and thought-provoking learning opportunities provided through personal, social and health education, tutor times and assemblies.

- Similarly, in key stages 1 and 2 leaders ensure that pupils' creativity and cultural awareness are developed well. Enrichment activities and debates all help to develop pupils' sense of awe and wonder and their understanding of different faiths and cultures. For example, inspectors witnessed Year 6 pupils engaged in high-quality reasoned debate stimulated by considering human rights. These types of activity help pupils to grow in confidence and develop a keen sense of equality and fairness.
- Pupils in the primary and secondary phases follow the national curriculum. Some primary pupils gain access to local grammar schools for secondary education, others seek places for post-16 education. Most go on to further education colleges, while some seek apprenticeships. Small numbers have remained in the school's sixth form to access the business studies vocational course. Most pupils are well prepared for life in diverse, modern Britain.
- The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education became sole sponsor of the academy following the previous inspection. They provide very high-quality support and challenge to school leaders. Leaders and teachers benefit from regular training and support. This work has facilitated many school improvements at a time of significant recruitment challenges and staffing turbulence.
- Leaders have made sure that a wide range of subjects are taught. Courses in key stage 4 have been restructured, and more pupils are now able to take a modern foreign language in key stage 4. Leaders are aware that more can be done to increase this provision still further and to broaden the range of vocational subjects on offer in the 16-19 study pathways. There are plans in place to achieve this.
- Subject leaders ensure that throughout the school the curriculum enthuses and motivates pupils. However, in the primary phase standards in science and the wider curriculum are not yet as consistently high as they are in English and mathematics. Similarly, in key stages 3 and 4 pupils are not consistently applying their writing, communication and mathematical skills across the wider curriculum in enough depth.
- Senior leaders have significantly improved the standing of the school within the local community. Most parents have confidence in the leadership team and would recommend the school. However, a minority of parents expressed worries about pupils' behaviour or the progress their children make. Improved communication is needed to address these concerns.

Governance of the school

- Since the previous inspection, the sponsorship of the school has been streamlined and governance restructured and re-organised. The governing body is now highly effective. Trustees and governors bring a wealth of skills and educational experience and undertake regular training and updates. This enables them to provide insightful support and challenge to leaders at all levels.
- Governors are committed to the success of Aylesbury Vale Academy and carry out their statutory duties diligently. They share the executive principal's aims and vision for the

school, and they manage his performance well. Governors ensure the fair and consistent application of systems and policies.

- Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and current priorities for the school. They have successfully challenged leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to improve attendance. Regular reports, visits and meetings enable governors to skilfully evaluate aspects of the school, such as safeguarding, the provision for pupils with SEND and the impact of pupil premium funding on disadvantaged pupils' learning.
- Governors and leaders are aware that the academy website requires further updating in order to offer better communication about early years, the primary phase and the sixth form.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Well-managed systems and an effective team approach involving leaders across all phases, teachers and office staff ensure that all pupils are kept safe.
- There is a robust system in place to check adults' suitability to work with children and staff qualifications. Regular, high-quality training for all staff is provided by the school on safeguarding matters, and staff know how to react if they have any concerns about a child's welfare.
- Clear and comprehensive record-keeping supports work with external agencies, where appropriate, to help vulnerable pupils and their families.
- Leaders carry out detailed risk assessments and regular checks on all aspects of health and safety. This includes reviewing trips and visits and working with governors to conduct regular reviews of safeguarding systems. Staff are appropriately qualified in first aid.
- The school's curriculum includes suitable opportunities for pupils of all ages to learn about different aspects of safety, including when online.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching and learning in the primary phase leads to strong outcomes. In English and mathematics lessons, teachers typically use questioning effectively to motivate pupils and carefully check their understanding. School records and pupils' books demonstrate how pupils are building on their previous learning to improve their knowledge and skills over time.
- In Reception and the primary phase, the effective teaching of phonics ensures that pupils make strong progress in their reading skills. Reading is promoted well across the school in both the primary and secondary phases, enabling pupils to read challenging texts with expression and engagement. Staff make good use of the school's well-resourced library to promote reading.
- Consistent teaching in English and mathematics enables most pupils to make strong progress in these subjects across the primary phase. However, assessment is not always used effectively enough to refine teaching so that the most able pupils are

stretched sufficiently to achieve at the higher standard by the end of key stage 2.

- Most secondary teachers have a good subject knowledge and keen grasp of the courses that they are delivering. They plan engaging lessons which challenge pupils at an appropriate level. All teachers have access to professional development, and many have links with other schools to moderate their work.
- Typically, assessment is used well to promote pupils' progress. Pupils receive regular feedback in line with the school's policy. Most of them use this well to refine and improve their work. In addition, pupils receive valuable advice and guidance on how to succeed in examinations.
- Inspectors saw some very effective questioning by teachers, which deepened pupils' understanding and knowledge in a range of subjects. However, in foundation subjects in the secondary phase some teachers are not stretching pupils enough to apply their skills of writing, communication and mathematics in their work.
- Pupils' exercise books indicate that most pupils take pride in their work and have positive attitudes towards learning. Homework is used effectively to promote and consolidate learning.
- Pupils with SEND in the nursery and primary phases are enthusiastic learners. They make progress, because teachers plan activities well to meet their needs. Teaching assistants understand the needs of the pupils they work with and are therefore effective in supporting learning. Teachers' support for pupils with SEND in the secondary phase is similarly strong in English, Spanish and the vocational subjects. However, there are some inconsistencies in how well teachers and teaching assistants meet their needs in other subject areas.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are thoughtful and show respect for each other, staff and visitors. The relationships between adults and pupils are warm and positive.
- Pupils feel safe and they are safe. Leaders and governors are clear that pupils' welfare has top priority, and well-established systems are in place to offer guidance and support, involving external agencies where appropriate. Most parents and staff report that the children are well looked after and happy at the school.
- Pupils show a well-developed understanding and tolerance for others who are different from them. Tolerance and diversity are promoted well at Aylesbury Vale Academy.
- Pupils report that incidents of bullying are much rarer than they used to be. They know there is an adult in school they can speak with if they have any concerns. Checks of bullying records made by inspectors showed that incidents of bullying are followed up and resolved effectively.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about British values and other faiths and cultures effectively. Pupils of all ages can confidently recognise and value differences, and they respect views different

from their own.

- As they progress through the school, pupils grow in self-confidence and in their aspirations. Leaders have recently made significant improvements to careers advice and guidance. This now helps pupils to consider a range of post-16 and post-sixth form options that meet their interests and aptitudes and prepare them well for the next stages of education or employment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Senior leaders have transformed behaviour and conduct at the school. Older pupils were keen to share their recognition of how much behaviour has improved under the leadership of the executive principal. As one pupil described: 'This used to be a school where pupils wanted to leave; now they want to come here.'
- Staff share very high expectations of pupils' behaviour and most pupils live up to them. Classroom doors are open and there is a studious learning atmosphere across the school. Consistent approaches across the school have ensured that the rates of poor behaviour have plummeted over the last three years. Good support is provided for pupils who have difficulty managing their behaviour. The school works well with external agencies and families. Permanent exclusions are only used as a last resort.
- Most pupils have very positive attitudes towards their learning. They concentrate well and take pride in their work. However, a few pupils can become distracted when activities do not fully motivate or challenge them.
- Leaders' promotion of good attendance and punctuality has been particularly effective. Overall attendance improved from a dip last year and is now much closer to the national average. Punctuality has significantly improved. Similarly, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved, although gaps remain.
- Attendance is monitored through well-structured systems, and the school does all that it can to engage pupils in their learning. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is reducing. However, the attendance of pupils with SEND is still well behind that of their peers. Leaders and governors are very aware of these differences and have prioritised resources to continue to address them.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Much improved teaching, learning and assessment have improved achievement across all year groups in a range of subjects, especially in English and mathematics.
- The teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1 is good. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 is consistently above the national average. In lessons, older pupils are supported to read with confidence, and they analyse texts well.
- The proportion of pupils achieving and exceeding age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 is in line with the national averages. 2018 was the first year of published results for key stage 2 for the academy. By the end of Year 6, pupils had made progress in line with the national average. However,

fewer pupils achieved the higher standard in reading and mathematics than might be expected.

- Pupils' progress at the end of key stage 4 has significantly improved since the previous inspection. Progress had been well below average in 2016 and improved in 2017. Published performance information in 2018 indicates that pupils in Year 11 made good progress.
- Work in pupils' books indicates good progress across a range of subjects in all year groups. Some very strong progress was seen in English, Spanish and business studies, because pupils were given clear targets and demanding work. However, in some areas of the wider curriculum pupils are not challenged sufficiently to apply their literacy and numeracy skills to produce in-depth explanations and descriptions. Leaders have recognised this and rightly included it as a focus in the school improvement plans.
- Targeted support ensures that disadvantaged pupils are making much stronger progress than in the past. By the end of key stage 4, the differences between this group and their peers are beginning to diminish, but more work is needed to eliminate differences in achievement.
- Pupils with SEND are provided with teaching and resources appropriate to their specific need in the primary phase. As a result, most are making good progress across a range of subjects. Improvements are being made in the secondary phase, but there are still inconsistencies due to variations in teaching for this group in a minority of classes.
- Improved careers information and guidance ensure that pupils are well supported when making decisions about their examination courses and post-16 options. School staff and independent careers advisers support pupils and their parents in the choice of course best suited to the pupil. As a result, the proportion of pupils leaving the school who are not in education, training or employment has declined.

Early years provision

Good

- Strong leadership is successfully improving the early years provision with energy and enthusiasm. Leaders are ambitious for all children to achieve well and be happy. Children enjoy a wide range of carefully planned, stimulating indoor and outdoor activities. As a result, children get a good start to their education.
- Leaders have accurately identified that, when they join the setting, some children's speech and language skills are weaker than is typical. Proficient work with external specialists enables staff to understand these children's needs well. Consequently, carefully planned activities and adept adult support enable effectively these children to improve their communication skills quickly.
- Children achieve good outcomes in the early years setting. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been steadily improving over time and, in 2018, was above the national average. Disadvantaged children and those with SEND are making good progress, because staff skilfully identify their needs and support them well. Assessment of children's learning is typically accurate, although sometimes less precise in the Nursery than in the Reception classes.
- Children develop positive attitudes to their learning. They are curious and inquisitive. Children become engrossed in their learning for sustained periods of time, because

activities are interesting, motivating and well matched to their needs and interests.

- Adults skilfully extend children’s learning through thoughtful questions, encouraging them to think deeply as they play. This could be seen working well as children rolled dough and explored the impact of using various utensils.
- Children behave well in the early years. They thrive, because relationships between adults and children are consistently warm and positive. The atmosphere is calm and relaxed. Routines are understood and well established. As a result, children are happy and secure because they know exactly what is expected of them.
- Children’s early reading, writing and mathematical skills are efficiently developed. For example, children enjoy many opportunities to count, compare shapes and sizes and explore volume and capacity. Children’s reading and writing are developing well. Children write short words accurately, using their developing knowledge of phonics.
- Safeguarding is effective. Adults ensure that the setting is reliably safe. They vigilantly undertake daily risk assessments of the environment and the materials children use. Adults provide helpful support to encourage children to keep themselves safe and manage risks, such as when using tools and equipment.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Historically, outcomes in the small sixth-form provision have been variable. Typically, students made very strong progress from their starting points and achieve well in vocational courses. However, the very small numbers taking academic courses in the past did much less well compared to other students nationally.
- Last year, leaders took decisive action to restructure the sixth form. The school no longer offers academic routes and is seeking to specialise in a distinctive vocational curriculum offer. Leaders conducted an analysis of recent years’ examination results, local demographic trends and the interests and aspirations of the students. Building on previous success, the current curriculum offers a small group of learners the opportunity to engage in a vocational business studies course. Leaders have established plans for a broader range of vocational courses to be made available from next year and cohorts are expected to increase.
- Students engage in a wide range of enrichment programmes, including work experience with a wide range of reputable companies and organisations. Learners in Year 13 told us that work experience had helped them to make decisions about their choice of university courses and apprenticeship pathways.
- Teachers have detailed knowledge, much of which is gained from working with their contacts in industries and commerce. In addition, they have a deep understanding of the requirements of the BTEC National Extended Diploma which they use well to methodically guide and support students through the two-year programme.
- Students enter Year 12 with GCSE grades that are lower than in most other sixth forms. Leaders and staff know each of the students very well. Consequently, students’ progress is tracked carefully. This helps staff to ensure that effective support is provided where needed, including in literacy and numeracy.
- Students’ make good progress in the sixth form. Their work is generally of a high

standard, and students are on track to achieve the challenging targets their teachers set.

- In 2018, students who completed the post-16 programme at the school went on to destinations of their choice, including universities, apprenticeships and employment. No students left without firm plans for their futures.
- In the past, the careers education and advice that pupils received when making choices to study post 16 and after they left the sixth form was not sufficient or helpful. This has changed. Students now gain access to independent careers advice and suitable work experience opportunities. Students in Year 12 are now confident that they will be better supported, having observed the provision for the current Year 13, including visits to universities, careers fairs and an apprenticeship day.

School details

Unique reference number	135879
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10046552

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1431
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	28
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Rosalind Rochefort
Executive Principal	Roger Burman
Telephone number	01296 428551
Website	www.theacademy.me
Email address	principal@theacademy.me
Date of previous inspection	23–24 November 2016

Information about this school

- Aylesbury Vale Academy is a large all-through school with increasing numbers in the nursery, primary and secondary phases.
- The proportions of disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language are both much higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is similar to that found nationally.
- The school does not use any alternative provision. All pupils are educated on site.

- The school serves a mobile population, with pupils enrolling or leaving through the year.
- The community served by Aylesbury Vale Academy has above average levels of deprivation.
- The school is led by an executive principal appointed in April 2016, and a vice-principal. There have been several changes to leadership and staffing over the past two years. An acting primary headteacher and interim primary deputy headteacher were appointed in September 2018. Several other leaders took up their posts in September 2018.
- The school had a section 48 denominational inspection in July 2018.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited over 70 lessons to gather evidence to contribute to the evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors heard a small selection of pupils read, and visited tutor time, the library and an assembly.
- Meetings were held with the executive principal, acting primary headteacher, senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body. A meeting was held with representatives from the Oxford diocese, which sponsors the academy. Inspectors also considered a range of reports from external consultants.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and looked at their work across a range of subjects. They spoke to pupils around the school at lunchtime, breaktime and during lessons. Inspector met with a group of primary and secondary pupils and a group of sixth formers to gather their views.
- Inspectors considered feedback from 100 responses to the online questionnaire Parent View, including 37 free-text responses. In addition, conversations were held with several parents at the beginning of the first day of the inspection to gather their views. Inspectors also considered the views represented in the school's own parental surveys and those expressed within 83 replies to a staff survey.
- A wide range of school documentation was scrutinised, including that relating to policies, self-evaluation, improvement planning, safeguarding, pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors reviewed the record of leaders' vetting and checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils and spoke to staff and governors about safeguarding procedures in the school.

Inspection team

Matthew Newberry, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Karen Roche	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Turner	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Prince	Her Majesty's Inspector
Suzanne Richards	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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