

Alchemy School

72 Station Road, Teynham, Sittingbourne ME9 9SN

Inspection dates

9 to 11 July 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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has a clear vision for high-quality education to meet the complex needs of the pupils who attend Alchemy School.
- Leaders have strong links with locality partners and colleagues, who are supporting the development of provision well.
- The safeguarding of pupils, both in and outside of school, is of central importance. Staff respond quickly and effectively to any concerns.
- The curriculum has been well developed to interest pupils and help them to meet their future goals and aspirations.
- The needs of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) who attend the school are met well. Staff pay careful attention to pupils' individual needs.
- Pupils behave well. They are supported in developing appropriate behaviours by the high and consistent expectations of staff.
- Parents are fully supportive of the school. All of those who completed the Ofsted survey, Parent View, would recommend it.
- Although many pupils are new to the school, work in their books shows good progress from their starting points. Pupils' progress in reading is less evident.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Nevertheless, for many, regular attendance remains a challenge. Leaders are aware of the need to continually explore individual barriers to attendance, and to reduce these wherever possible.
- Teaching builds on pupils' prior learning through careful assessment and consideration of pupils' needs. However, sometimes the targets set for pupils lack the necessary precision to help them to know what they need to do to improve.
- The school development plan is not yet fully formed. As yet, limited outcomes information is available. Leaders are aware of the need to analyse outcomes in order to develop provision, evaluate performance and inform next steps.
- Wisely, the advisory committee has been set up to provide leaders with support and challenge. The group's members currently lack clarity about their roles. They do not have the information they need to hold leaders to account effectively.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the capacity of leaders to drive the school forward and help raise levels of accountability by:
 - ensuring that the school development plan is further developed so that its purpose is clear and there is a sharp focus on emerging outcomes for pupils
 - using development plans to set clear targets for leaders, including the headteacher
 - providing the advisory committee members with information that allows them to hold leaders robustly to account
 - setting clear expectations and actions for the advisory committee.
- Further develop teaching, particularly of reading, and ensure that targets for pupils are sharply focused on measurable success.
- Continue to explore ways of raising pupils' attendance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher demonstrates clarity of purpose and strong determination to raise the achievements and aspirations of the vulnerable pupils who attend Alchemy School. Since starting to work with pupils in February of this year, leaders have successfully established a range of services, including full- and part-time provision and an outreach service.
- Leaders have successfully ensured that the school meets all of the independent school standards. Although there is not currently a school website, key information and school policies, including information about safeguarding, are made available to parents when pupils join the school.
- There is a palpable, caring atmosphere at the school. The school's aims are delivered well, and all staff demonstrate a passion to ensure that pupils feel safe, important, cared for and respected. Parents value highly their children's happiness at school. One parent commented: 'He comes home from school happy and full of stories.'
- Strong links have been established with local secondary schools. This supports both the sharing of information and effective professional development through providing training opportunities for staff. Leaders have ensured that all staff have access to the support they need to further develop their skills towards a range of professional qualifications.
- Leaders have worked proactively with the local community to enhance and develop relationships and mutual understanding. For instance, a recent open day welcomed neighbours into the school. Any reported concerns have been swiftly and effectively addressed.
- Leaders have taken care to ensure that the curriculum offers options which engage pupils' interests and support them in attaining their aspirations. During the inspection, pupils were selecting their curriculum options for the following year. They had had taster sessions which helped them to make their choices in an informed way. A pupil excitedly explained how these had helped him to select health and social care and design technology. Other taster sessions had given pupils experience of, for example, music, boxing, gardening and hair and beauty.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a unifying theme across the school. Both in everyday interactions and specific units of work, pupils' view of the world and their place in it is carefully shaped and expanded.
- Leaders have ensured that fundamental British values such of democracy, rule of law and individual liberty are important areas of study for pupils. This work is adapted to respond to particular areas of concern raised by national or local statistics. For instance, there has been a focus on developing an understanding of the rising problems associated with knife crime.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They recognise the positive impact the education provided is having on their children. They value the strong communication and support they receive. A parent expressed the important sense of togetherness this creates, saying: 'We have so many challenges, but together we can face them.'
- A wide range of assessment systems have been developed. Leaders use this information

to monitor both the progress pupils make against their social and emotional targets and pupils' academic achievements. Critically, leaders also use this information carefully to tailor classroom learning and individual interventions to pupils' needs. Nonetheless, occasionally, teachers do not translate this wealth of information precisely enough into clear targets for pupils.

- Currently, school development planning is not strong enough. While a limited amount of information is available because the school has not been open long, the headteacher is aware of the need to review provision more sharply. As a result, systems such as performance management are not sufficiently well developed to drive school improvement in line with the high aspirations held by leaders.

Governance

- The school does not have a governing body.
- Wisely, the proprietors have ensured that an advisory committee is in place to support and challenge the work of school leaders. This is of particular importance in establishing an objective view of the school's strengths and needs as the headteacher is also one of the proprietors of the school.
- The chair of the advisory board has the relevant skills and experience to offer the support and challenge sought by school leaders. Minutes of the first meeting of the advisory board indicate that a broad base of professional skill has been recruited to facilitate this.
- Nevertheless, the advisory committee have not yet established clear functions and resultant actions. There has only been one meeting since the school opened to pupils in February. Minutes of the meeting lack structure and a clear understanding of purpose. The chair knows that more information and clearer ways of working are needed to help members to work together effectively in the very best interests of students.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff receive suitable and timely training to develop their skills in keeping pupils safe. For instance, they demonstrate strong, contextual safeguarding knowledge regarding peer-to-peer abuse. They know how individual pupils at Alchemy School could be vulnerable to this type of risk. Staff ensure that a culture of vigilance exists at school.
- Leaders work well with a range of other agencies to share information that helps keep pupils safe. They make timely and well-informed referrals when these are needed. Any indicators that pupils could be at risk, for instance late arrival or non-attendance, are responded to swiftly and in keeping with the individual needs of pupils. Communication with parents to help keep pupils safe is particularly strong. These strong links help keep pupils safe.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum is adapted to respond to pupils' safety needs. For instance, a recent assessment indicated that pupils need to develop a greater awareness of some aspects of staying safe online. As a result, the planned curriculum has been adapted accordingly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is typically well organised. Learning is generally structured carefully to ensure that pupils, including those with EHC plans, make good progress from their individual starting points. When appropriate, pupils are provided with the breaks they need to sustain their focus over time. This time is put to good use to develop other areas of pupils' development, such as their social interaction skills. Learning time is rarely wasted.
- Teaching staff ask searching questions, both to gauge what pupils understand, and to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teaching is usually paced effectively and provokes useful dialogue that helps pupils firmly embed and connect their knowledge.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to support pupils. Their relationships with pupils are typified by a degree of good-humoured banter which is enjoyed by all, but carefully managed to stay focused on the learning in hand.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons. They particularly like mathematics, English and physical education (PE). The teaching they receive helps to build their confidence and skills. A pupil describing why he liked mathematics said: 'Because I'm good at it. I know I'm good because I enjoy it and I get it right.' In a mathematics lesson, key stage 3 pupils demonstrated their knowledge well in using formulae and a knowledge of terms such as 'diameter' and 'circumference' to explore the properties of circles.
- Where appropriate, homework is well used to support pupils. For instance, pupils benefited by pre-learning some of the key names and vocabulary they would need to study Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.
- Teaching staff have detailed knowledge of the individual needs of pupils. They use a raft of assessments to carefully match learning to individual needs. While teachers set targets for pupils to help them in understanding how to improve, sometimes targets lack the clarity evident in their assessment information and planning.
- Teaching recognises the central importance of developing reading skills at every opportunity. In an English lesson, a pupil was proud to be able to use his skills to confidently read aloud the blurb from the back of a new book they were about to study. Nevertheless, teachers aspire to providing more individual reading support sessions. These have been planned to start in September. Leaders have ensured that staff have the support they need, for example in phonics training, to deliver individual reading support to a high standard.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff model consistently high aspirations for pupils. For example, they talk positivity and frequently about exams. As a result, pupils, many of whom had negative feelings or experiences associated with exams, now radiate aspiration and confidence. A pupil explained: 'Before, I wouldn't go into school for exams or revision, now I'm ok'.
- Pupils are supported well to develop their personal and social skills. This raises their confidence and supports them successfully in engaging with the wider community. For instance, several pupils who enjoy sport at school have joined local clubs or now take part

in sport outside of school.

- Staff consistently tackle any derogatory language or unacceptable attitudes, such as racism. As a result, pupils have developed better self-regulation and understand what is and isn't acceptable at school and in the wider world.
- Pupils feel well cared for at school. They value the good relationships they develop with staff and with each other. A pupil encapsulated this in reflecting: 'People are just nice. We sort out problems. We have a little chat.'
- Parents recognise the high-quality care that their children receive and how that supports their learning. Parents writing on Parent View described the impact of this: 'His whole attitude to learning has changed.' They pinpoint this high-quality welfare as being of central importance in their children's success. A parent commented: 'My child seems proud to be part of the school and has a sense of belonging.' And another parent commented that, 'For the first time he is starting to trust adults.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils mostly behave well. During lessons pupils generally attend well and apply themselves to the tasks they are set. If this presents particular challenges for pupils, staff provide skilful support that encourages them to try their best and experience success.
- Some pupils present some challenging behaviours and a high level of anxiety. These issues are managed exceptionally well by the staff, who use pupils' individual plans to respond appropriately to incidents of difficult behaviour as they arise. Pupils achieve well because staff deploy successful techniques to soothe their anxieties, de-escalate tensions, and manage any disruptive behaviour.
- Pupils recognise how their often improved behaviours have been fundamental in experiencing success. A pupil summed this up as: 'The guys here have helped. Everything has got better, mainly behaviour. I don't know what's different, it just is.'
- For some pupils regular school attendance is a challenge. Staff understand the often complex reasons behind this. They work resolutely to support pupils in attending well. Leaders know that irregular attendance is both a barrier to achievement and potentially presents a safeguarding risk for some pupils. They continue to work with school leaders, a range of agencies and parents to find bespoke solutions to the individual challenges for pupils and to help them to attend school regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Throughout the school, pupils make strong progress in their social and emotional development. A wide range of high-quality interventions ensure that pupils develop the life skills they need to lead successful and fulfilling lives.
- There are no Year 11 students currently attending the school and so no external examinations have been taken this year. However, destinations are already being considered for the Year 10 pupils for next year. Pupils demonstrate determination to attain well. A pupil said: 'Considering when I came, I could barely read and write and maths was rubbish, now I'm OK'

- School information and work in exercise books show that pupils make good progress in English and mathematics from their starting points. Pupils' writing demonstrates that most achieve well over time despite having been at the school for only part of the year since it opened.
- The high proportion of pupils with an EHC plan are making good progress from their starting points. Their provision is regularly reviewed and carefully adapted so that it meets their needs well.
- Pupils' physical development is good. Ample opportunities are provided for pupils to be fit and active. Pupils enjoy the team games and participate with resilience and generally good humour.
- Pupils' wider curriculum books demonstrate a developing knowledge base across the curriculum. Pupils have learned about a range of religions. They have developed scientific knowledge and explored key historic events such as World War Two. In art, pupils learn about a range of techniques, such as shading, which they apply confidently to their own designs.
- Pupils often lack confidence in reading. Teaching recognises this and provides opportunity for pupils to develop confidence and skills. Pupils who read during the inspection did so with determination, demonstrating a range of skills. Nevertheless, staff rightly have identified this as a key focus area for pupils and have planned an enhanced level of provision to help them master skills and read with increased enjoyment.

School details

Unique reference number	146736
DfE registration number	886/6153
Inspection number	10100152

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	21
Number of part-time pupils	9
Proprietor	L & P Educational Services Ltd
Chair	Jill Ansell
Headteacher	Lisa Scott
Annual fees (day pupils)	£26,910
Telephone number	01795 521 941
Website	None
Email address	lisascott@alchemyschools.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Alchemy School occupies a former doctors' surgery in Teynham, Kent.
- Following registration in December 2018, the school accepted pupils from February 2019. It caters for pupils in need of an alternative educational programme, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) such as social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The school offers provision for full- and part-time pupils. Some outreach is also provided.
- The school does not currently have any pupils on roll beyond Year 10, although it is

registered to provide for students up to 19 years old.

- A high proportion of pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not have a website.
- The school's proprietor is L&P Educational Services Limited, which comprises the headteacher and one other director. The school is led by the leadership team and supported by an 'advisory council'.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was the first inspection since the school's pre-registration inspection in December 2018.
- The inspector visited lessons across the school. Pupils' behaviour was observed around the school, including breaktimes.
- The inspector looked at pupils' work in lessons and scrutinised a selection of pupils' books.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders.
- The inspector met with a representative of a local secondary school and spoke to the chair of the advisory committee on the telephone.
- The inspector met formally pupils and spoke informally to other pupils during lessons and as they moved around the school. The inspector heard a pupil read.
- A wide range of documentation was considered, including: the school's planning; minutes of the advisory committee's meetings; information on pupils' progress and attainment; and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance. The inspector scrutinised records relating to safeguarding.
- The inspector took account of parents' views through 13 responses to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, including 10 free-text comments. The inspector also met with some parents during the inspection.

Inspection team

Deborah Gordon, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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