

Inspection of Axe Valley Academy

Chard Street, Axminster, Devon EX13 5EA

Inspection dates: 3–4 December 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They feel safe and well supported. Pupils and staff get along well, and this creates a warm and friendly environment.

Pupils are tolerant. They understand and appreciate those who are different from them. Pupils are eager to learn about the world and their place within it.

Pupils are often confident to have a go and to make mistakes. However, sometimes they have not been taught well enough, so they cannot work things out for themselves. This stops them from learning. It means that they do not always achieve well.

Leaders have worked hard to improve behaviour. Pupils say that behaviour is better. However, there are still times when learning is disrupted. In these cases, pupils do not think it fair that some teachers do not apply the school's behaviour rules. Bullying does not happen very often. Pupils say that they know whom they would go to if it happened to them. They trust staff to deal with it well.

Pupils talk enthusiastically about school, their sporting achievements and participation in music ensembles. Pupils feel valued and they wear their leadership and achievement badges with pride.

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

The newly appointed headteacher is determined and ambitious for the school. The trust, governors and staff support her vision. Staff say that they feel listened to and are now positive about the direction of the school.

Pupils select subjects to study for GCSE during Year 8. Some pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, stop learning subjects such as geography, history and modern foreign languages at the end of Year 8. The curriculum is not ambitious or broad enough for all pupils.

Leaders have not thought carefully about the important knowledge that pupils should learn in key stage 3. They have not guided teachers well enough. In some subjects, pupils learn the same topics they will study for GCSE. Pupils say that it is repetitive. Pupils' experience of key stage 3 does not stay broad enough for long enough.

Pupils do not always remember what they have learned. For example, when they need to recall their knowledge about the First World War for their study of war poetry, they are unable to do so. Pupils say that they sometimes feel overloaded with new things to learn, particularly in science and languages. Teachers are aware of this. They are starting to use different ways to help pupils know and remember more.

Teaching does not always meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The information about what works well for these pupils is sometimes sketchy or out of date. The newly appointed leader of SEND has started to put this right. However, pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they could.

Pupils in the younger year groups attend school well. However, disadvantaged pupils' absence is too high across the school. Leaders take action, but they sometimes wait too long for external support.

Pupils are well informed about relationships, British values and mental and physical well-being. They follow a careers programme that has strong local business links and well-planned work experience and a life skills programme. This prepares pupils well for life after school.

Leaders have identified that pupils need to read more widely. Some pupils say that they do not read books. The school has developed a reading programme to tackle this. Although it is early days, some pupils say that they visit the library more and enjoy the opportunity to read with their tutors.

The trust is supporting the headteacher. It accurately identified actions required to strengthen the leadership of the school. The local governing board shares the headteacher's vision and understands its role. It does not, however, have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They are aware of the risks of social media. Pupils trust staff and say that there is always someone to talk to if they need help.

School leaders, governors and staff are thoroughly trained in how to keep pupils safe. They understand the risks pupils can face. Staff know pupils well and they act appropriately if a pupil is at risk.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not have a secure knowledge and understanding of what a strong curriculum and effective pedagogy look like. This means that pupils do not learn as well as they should. The school needs to strengthen curriculum leadership at all levels. Leaders will then be able to support teachers to implement a more ambitious and effective curriculum.
- Teaching does not meet the needs of pupils with SEND well enough. This

means that these pupils do not do as well as they should. Leaders and teachers should raise their aspirations for pupils with SEND. They need to make sure that appropriate strategies are in place to ensure that pupils with SEND achieve well.

- Many disadvantaged pupils follow a curriculum that is too narrow. They also do not attend well. These factors undermine the quality of education they receive. Governors, trustees and senior leaders should ensure that they swiftly and precisely identify barriers that prevent disadvantaged pupils from attending school regularly. Leaders should ensure that the extra funding the school receives for these pupils is used more ambitiously and effectively to enable pupils to achieve well across a broad curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	144392
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10122325
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	620
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Emma Fielding
Headteacher	Laura Jenkins
Website	www.axevalley.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Axe Valley Academy became part of the Uffculme Academy Trust in September 2019.
- The school closed its sixth form in July 2019 and is now an 11–16 school.
- The school uses alternative provision provided by One to One Mentors, CMAS, Stansfield Academy and Saints Academy.

Information about this inspection

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

- We met with the chief executive officer of the trust, the chair of the local governing board and the SEND governor. We also met with the headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders and the special educational needs coordinator.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: English, history, modern foreign languages and science. We visited lessons, met with staff, looked at pupils' work, talked with pupils, interviewed curriculum leaders and examined documentation.
- We met with the designated safeguarding lead. We talked with a range of staff

about safeguarding training. We examined documentation and school records.

- We spoke with pupils to discuss their views about the school. We considered 44 responses to the pupil survey, 47 responses to the staff survey and 48 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Inspection team

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