

Inspection of a good school: St Aldhelm's Academy

Herbert Avenue, Poole, Dorset BH12 4HS

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 November 2021

Outcome

St Aldhelm's Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils value the academy's strong community ethos. Positive relationships between staff and pupils underpin this. Most pupils are attentive and conduct themselves well. Many aspire to achieve, and they take pride in their work. Across most subjects, teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes. However, sometimes expectations are not as high. Some do not apply the behaviour policy as intended, and some pupils disturb lessons.

Pupils rightly believe this is an inclusive school. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds are valued. Most say they feel safe. Pupils say most staff resolve issues, including bullying, quickly. However, like parents, they also believe that sometimes challenging behaviour is not managed well. These issues have been at their worst since pupils have returned after the lockdowns that were put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Coupled with high numbers of new teachers and rapid growth in pupil numbers, pupils are less settled than they typically would be.

The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. There are plentiful opportunities for pupils to explore their interests. Pupils learn about the importance of diversity and citizenship. However, some pupils still struggle to treat differences with respect. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn alongside their peers. Many rightly believe they are supported effectively.

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

Leaders have constructed a well-sequenced, broad curriculum. Their work is rooted in a clear moral purpose to improve outcomes for all pupils. Leaders ensure that pupils have access to academic and vocational opportunities. English Baccalaureate subjects are at the core of the academy's offer. Leaders help pupils to make well-informed choices for their future career pathways, including routes into apprenticeships when appropriate. Curriculum plans are carefully tailored to meet the needs and interests of pupils. Pupils

recognise this. For example, many say they appreciate how well they are taught in English and mathematics, but that they can still access drama, the arts and humanities.

Trust leaders, trustees and local committee members share leaders' ambition. They know the school well. They look to ensure that the school's curriculum promotes pupils' academic, social and emotional success. For example, they have provided useful financial support to maintain the implementation of the curriculum during and since the pandemic. Committee members provide probing challenge for leaders.

Leaders identify the strengths and weaknesses of provision accurately. They act swiftly to tackle areas that could be better. For example, leaders have recognised the challenges presented by the rapid growth at the school. This coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and several changes to the teaching team. This has led to some inconsistencies in the implementation of school policies relating to behaviour, bullying and SEND.

Curriculum leaders are skilled, passionate and effective. The English, science, mathematics and humanities curriculums are effective. For example, the English curriculum is very well and creatively sequenced. Pupils learn to embed key knowledge through consistent approaches to teaching and learning. There are regular assessment schedules in subjects, with pupils completing written assessments termly and informal assessments more frequently. However, leaders know that a few subject curriculums could be strengthened further. For example, the implementation of the curriculum for languages is less secure. Similarly, personal, social and health education is still in the process of being adapted to reflect the changing needs of pupils since the pandemic and could have more impact.

Leaders' reading strategy is having mixed results. The strategy is having the desired impact for those in the early stages of reading. Many gain the knowledge and skills they need to become fluent readers quickly. However, for other pupils, the strategy is not helping them as much as it could. For example, the strategy does not ensure that confident readers improve their abilities consistently. Some pupils are not developing a love of reading. A few do not understand the importance of reading in order to access the wider curriculum.

Pupils, including those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils, achieve well at this school. Pupils say that lessons are often interesting, and feedback from teachers is helpful. Teachers reteach content when pupils have found new ideas hard to remember. This helps pupils to remember key elements of the curriculum well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding leaders have established strong systems for recording concerns that are followed diligently by staff. Staff are well trained to spot signs that pupils may be at risk. They have good relationships with pupils, most parents and other agencies. Consequently, leaders make sure that pupils get the support they need.

Safer recruitment practice meets statutory expectations. Appropriate checks are made on new staff. These are recorded on a single central register. The register is overseen by an appropriately trained member of staff and checked regularly by leaders. References are sought from the most recent employer. As a result, leaders do all they can to ensure that those who work at the school are appropriate and safe for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Since the beginning of the pandemic, pupil numbers have risen significantly. At the same time, there have been several changes to staff. As a result, the implementation of policies relating to behaviour, bullying and SEND are not applied as consistently as they should be. Leaders should ensure that they improve the implementation of school policies so that pupils' behaviour is managed consistently.
- In a few subjects, the curriculum is not implemented as well as in others. This means that pupils' learning can vary. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum is implemented as coherently as in English, mathematics and science across all subjects. They need to ensure that the personal, social and health education curriculum has greater impact on pupils' respect for others. Similarly, they need to ensure that teachers, particularly in languages, have consistent expectations of pupils in all curriculum areas.
- The reading strategy is not impactful enough. Although there are useful strategies to help those who are early readers make progress, the strategy does not demand enough of more confident readers. Nor does it ensure that all pupils develop a love of reading. Leaders should review the strategy to ensure that all pupils recognise that reading is a priority and develop a love of reading and an understanding of its value.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View 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 are the school and you are 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	136206
Local authority	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole
Inspection number	10199662
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	780
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Caroline Sard
Principal	Mrs Joanna Amos
Website	www.staldhelms-academy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	2 and 3 March 2016

Information about this school

- St Aldhelm's Academy is a smaller than average secondary school.
- Since the last inspection, a new principal has been appointed. There have been a large number of changes in staffing, including the appointment of some early career teachers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection of the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- We met with senior and subject leaders, including the headteacher. We looked at records relating to incidents, including behaviour. We met with the special educational needs coordinator, the chair of the board of trustees, the chair of the local governing committee and the chief executive officer. We discussed leaders' evaluations, priorities for improvement and the curriculum.

- We did deep dives into three subjects: English, mathematics and religious studies, as well as reviewing the reading strategy. We met with senior and subject leaders, teachers and pupils. We also visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work and talked to pupils. We reviewed some subject planning and spoke to leaders about other subjects.
- We analysed 27 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parents' survey, as well as 47 responses to the pupils' survey and 55 responses to the survey for staff.
- We analysed school documentation, including leaders' evaluations and plans for improvement and paperwork relating to the work of the local governing committee. We scrutinised a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Matthew Collins

Ofsted Inspector

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