

Inspection of an outstanding school: Aspire Academy Bexley

South Gipsy Road, Welling, Kent DA16 1JB

Inspection dates:

24 and 25 November 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending school and do so very regularly. They appreciate having 'golden' time, where they choose reward activities. They like socialising with their friends. Pupils have an excellent professional rapport with all adults at the school. Staff know them extremely well. These trusting relationships help pupils to thrive. Teachers expect pupils to try their best in class. If pupils find it hard to concentrate, teachers provide well-selected resources to help them to focus on their learning. Staff help pupils to manage their behaviour through a variety of therapies and sessions including Lego therapy, counselling, 'draw and talk', or spending time with Loki, the school's therapy dog.

Teachers deal effectively with any bullying. Pupils said that they would speak to any teacher if a peer was unkind to them. Pupils can report any concerns through the worry box, if they prefer. The school has recently taken part in anti-bullying week. As part of this, pupils wore odd socks to celebrate their uniqueness. They went on a kindness sponsored walk with staff, parents and carers to raise money for their school. Many parents are proud that their children attend this school.

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

After a period of change the school is settling down under new leadership. The co-heads of school are well established members of staff. They know the school's strengths and areas for development.

All staff work hard to meet pupils' needs. The newly appointed behaviour team offer support and expertise. There is a clear and consistent behaviour strategy in place. Leaders plan additional sessions to support individual pupils. These include help to develop self-regulation, resilience, and anger management. Staff try to understand the

story behind every behaviour episode. This helps to prevent incidents from escalating. Teachers manage any disruption well so that pupils can concentrate on their learning.

The special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) team assess pupils on entry to the school. They check that pupils' needs are met and check pupils' learning regularly. Specialist SEND staff provide pupils with therapies and academic support. They work with teaching staff to ensure that the needs of each pupil are met so that they learn and make progress through the curriculum.

Staff prepare pupils for life outside school. Pupils are encouraged to respect and follow rules. They are taught the importance of being a good citizen and a kind friend. Pupils learn about different religious beliefs through the curriculum. Through events such as Black History Month, they are helped to think about tolerance, racism and inequality. Pupils are encouraged to understand the importance of respect for different people. The school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is carefully sequenced. It also allows flexibility for teachers to respond to issues as they arise. All pupils take part in an extra-curricular activity on Friday afternoons. They choose from a range including Spanish, animal care, football, food technology, computing and film making.

Leaders introduced a phonics programme in September 2021 to support pupils' reading fluency. They were concerned that pupils found reading difficult. In the past, pupils did not enjoy reading. All pupils have phonics four times a week. All staff in the school have had phonics training. Teachers are growing in confidence in teaching phonics. However, pupils are not applying phonics knowledge routinely when they read aloud. This will take time because the new programme has only recently been introduced.

Subject leaders know their subjects well. Subject curriculums are typically well planned and sequenced because subject leaders have thought carefully about what they want pupils to know and remember. Teachers make sure that pupils revisit what they have previously learned to help them to memorise key information. Staff use assessment information to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. Some curriculum planning is not as well thought out. In mathematics, the curriculum does not give pupils enough opportunities to work on problem-solving and reasoning.

Staff value the support of their colleagues. They said that leaders take account of staff workload and well-being. There are three formal assessments of pupils' achievement each year. Staff said this is manageable. Leaders provide opportunities for staff to develop their own leadership skills through the trust, which staff appreciate.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding team know pupils and their families well. They know the school's local safeguarding context. They understand that pupils may be particularly vulnerable to online risks. They work with pupils and parents to make them aware of these risks and help them to understand how to keep safe from harm. Staff are well trained to spot if a pupil is having any difficulties.

The school liaises with agencies such as social services and the police should any concerns arise. They contact the parents of pupils who are absent to make sure they are safe. Trustees are well trained in safeguarding matters. They ensure that the leaders with responsibility for safeguarding get the time and support that they need to do the job effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Subject curriculums are typically well-planned and sequenced. However, in mathematics the curriculum does not give pupils enough opportunities to work on problem-solving and reasoning. Pupils do not relate their learning to real life and sometimes lose focus. Leaders should ensure that the mathematics curriculum builds in more practical activities to help develop pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills.
- Leaders should continue to embed the new phonics scheme. This will help pupils to apply their phonics knowledge routinely, so that they become confident, fluent, and enthusiastic readers.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Westbrooke School, to be outstanding in July 2015.

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 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	144406
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	10206483
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Burnett
Executive headteacher	Neil Miller
Website	www.aspirebexley.org.uk/aspire
Date of previous inspection	16 and 17 July 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been some changes to the leadership of the school since the last inspection. Currently there are two co-heads of school in post. They work closely with an executive headteacher who is also deputy chief executive of the trust.
- The school is part of the London South East Academies Trust.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan for their social, emotional, and mental health needs.
- The school does not make any use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection 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.
- Inspectors met with the headteachers and senior leaders. They also met with the chief executive, trustees, and members of the local governing board.

- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and geography. Inspectors looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, reviewed pupils' work, met with pupils to discuss their learning, and met with subject leaders and teachers.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and had discussions about art, computing, design technology, English, music, PSHE, and science.
- Through discussions with leaders, trustees, pupils and staff, inspectors considered the effectiveness of safeguarding. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at different times of the day. They listened to pupils read aloud. The inspection team spoke to staff about their workload in school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. They also considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including free-text comments. Inspectors spoke to some parents in person.

Inspection team

Lisa Strong, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Francis Gonzalez

Ofsted Inspector

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