

Inspection of a good school: The Excel Academy

Milton Road, Sneyd Green, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST1 6LG

Inspection dates:

24 and 25 November 2021

Outcome

The Excel Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is a strong sense of community within this school. Staff and pupils talk positively about the 'Excel way'. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very strong and based on mutual respect. Pupils are proud of their school. They are happy and safe. If any bullying does take place, pupils know that teachers will deal with it. Pupils behave in a calm and mature manner. They move between lesson in an orderly way.

Pupils study a wide range of subjects and achieve well. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to support pupils in their learning. Leaders have high expectations for all pupils. Most pupils want to learn.

Leaders ensure that pupils have a wide range of opportunities available to them. There are several extra-curricular activities at lunchtime and after school. Older pupils enjoy running some of these activities. They say that this helps develop their leadership skills. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about personal safety. Issues discussed include knife crime and fire safety. Pupils also enjoy a programme that develops their personal character.

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

Leaders, including governors and trustees, are ambitious for all pupils. Skilled leaders have developed a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. They have thought carefully about what is taught and the order in which it is taught. This is helping pupils learn more and remember more over time. In mathematics, teachers are clear about how pupils build on what they know. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic about the subject and achieve well. There are similar strengths in the key stage 3 English curriculum. Pupils now read a broader range of classical literature, such as 'Beowulf' and texts by Chaucer. This is expanding pupils' knowledge and helping to develop pupils' wider understanding of English literature.

The curriculum offers a wide range of subjects in Years 10 and 11. Leaders encourage pupils to study the combination of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). In 2021, the proportion of pupils studying the EBacc was below the government's national ambition for all schools. Leaders have plans to address this by increasing the number of pupils who study a modern foreign language at key stage 4.

There is some variability in how well teachers check what pupils know and remember. In some subjects, for example mathematics, this is done effectively. In some other subjects, teachers do not quickly identify pupils' misconceptions. As a result, teachers sometimes move on to new learning before pupils have fully grasped previous content. Skilled and ambitious subject leaders recognise this, and plans are already in place to ensure greater levels of consistency.

Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have effective support. Teachers use the information they are given about pupils' needs effectively. Consequently, these pupils achieve well.

Reading is a priority for the school. There is effective support for pupils who find reading difficult. Year 7 pupils now have timetabled reading lessons. This is helping pupils to become more confident and fluent in their reading.

The school is calm and orderly. Pupils listen attentively during lessons and follow instructions. Many pupils commented that this was typical of behaviour in the school.

The personal, social, health and economic curriculum is well organised. Character development lessons are developing good habits and positive attitudes. Pupils are well informed about their next steps through the school's carefully planned careers programme.

Pupils value the wide range of extra-curricular clubs and teams available. Leaders also provide opportunities to promote equality and diversity. One pupil said, 'Teachers value that everyone is different. They have given me confidence in being who I am'. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their work supporting a range of local charities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils are confident that there is always someone to support them, if needed. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding. Teachers and support staff know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's safety or welfare. Leaders manage referrals effectively. They work well with external agencies, such as health and social care professionals, to support vulnerable pupils.

Governors check that safeguarding is effective. There are robust systems in place to ensure that staff are recruited safely.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The use of assessment is inconsistent between departments. In some subjects, teachers do not check pupils' understanding effectively. They are not always aware of pupils' misconceptions. Consequently, they do not always provide clear, direct feedback to address such misunderstandings. Leaders should ensure that assessment is used equally effectively in all subjects to help pupils to progress well through the curriculum

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 a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Holden Lane High School Specialist Sports College, to be good in October 2013.

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 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	140633
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10200377
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,117
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kate Townsend
Principal	Darren Bishop
Website	www.excelacademy.info
Date of previous inspection	16 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses six alternative education providers.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had 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.

- Meetings were held with the principal, senior leaders, middle leaders, support staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector met the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Alpha Academies Trust. The CEO is also a trustee of the Alpha Academies Trust.
- The lead inspector also met three members of the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: mathematics, science and English. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke with subject leaders, looked at

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