

Inspection of Ardley Hill Academy

Lowther Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 3NZ

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 February 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Ardley Hill Academy cares for its pupils. Pupils feel valued and safe.

Relationships between pupils and adults are respectful and positive. Pupils understand how the behaviour system works. Pupils follow the rules and are learning to resolve any disagreements between themselves. Pupils say that bullying is rare. If it happens, pupils feel well supported to resolve any incidents.

Most pupils listen well and enjoy their learning. However, some pupils have gaps in what they have learned because the curriculum they access does not consistently consider what pupils know before they move on to the next stages of their learning.

Pupils enjoy the broad range of clubs that are on offer, which are well attended. Pupils also talk positively about the number of ways that they can take on additional responsibilities. For example, they can be eco-warriors or sports leaders, or they can help out at open evenings.

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

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum they intend for pupils to learn. The curriculum in some areas is still developing. While some aspects of the curriculum's content and order of what pupils learn is effective, the delivery of the curriculum is inconsistent. This is because there remain areas that are not as well thought through about what pupils learn and when. This results in pupils not achieving as well as they could throughout the curriculum.

Subject leadership is not consistently effective across all the subjects. In subjects where the curriculum is working well, leaders have a secure subject knowledge and provide effective support and training. In these subjects, the curriculum that leaders have intended enables pupils to link what they have already learned to new learning. However, some subjects are at earlier stages of development. The curriculum is less thought through in these aspects of the curriculum. Leaders have not fully considered what pupils need to know and remember from early years to Year 6. As a result, in these areas of the curriculum, pupils are not well prepared for the next stages of their learning.

The reading curriculum has been considered by leaders, but there is more work to do. The reading curriculum is not well thought through to ensure that pupils build on their early reading to become fluent readers. Teachers' subject knowledge about how pupils learn to read is not strong enough. Combined, these aspects result in pupils having gaps in their reading skills. This includes those pupils who struggle with reading. Pupils currently do not make fast enough progress to become fluent and confident readers.

In early years, in line with the rest of the school, the curriculum that the children in early years access requires improvement. Leaders have not set out what children need to learn so that it builds on what has been learned before, or what children need to learn to be well prepared for Year 1.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well to ensure their social, personal and emotional needs are met. Their needs are accurately identified and this information is used effectively to help pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as their peers. While this is the case, the variability of the curriculum means that pupils with SEND are not achieving as well as they could.

Leaders have focused on improving behaviour throughout the school. A newly implemented behaviour system is ensuring that pupils' behaviour is effectively managed. Pupils know right from wrong. They understand how this links to following rules both in school and in the wider world. Pupils are welcoming and friendly to all, irrespective of any differences they may have.

Leaders plan and promote pupils' personal development well. Pupils learn how to be resilient, responsible and active citizens. Pupils can talk about ways in which they are different and how important it is to show tolerance and respect. This is demonstrated in their day-to-day lives.

While leaders check what is happening throughout the school, this is not rigorous enough to provide an accurate oversight of the quality of education and how what they intend is delivered well. Leaders do not have effective systems in place to check that their intended curriculum is being delivered as they would expect. Consequently, the focused areas to improve are not identified and acted on effectively.

Governors carry out checks on leaders' work and the information leaders share with them. However, they do not ask sufficiently probing questions to enable them to effectively hold leaders to account. This limits how well governors carry out their role and their effectiveness in securing school improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils and families who need additional help are quickly identified and are well supported by the schools' leaders. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to ensure that families get the help and support they need.

The curriculum content teaches pupils how to be healthy, including looking after their mental health. It teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe both in and out of school. Regular training supports staff to understand their role in keeping children safe and to act swiftly to address any safeguarding concern.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Throughout the school, including in early years, leaders have not identified the important content that pupils need to learn to become confident and fluent readers. Teachers do not have secure subject knowledge they need to teach reading well. Pupils do not build their reading knowledge and skills well enough. This impacts on how well pupils develop their reading fluency and, consequently, their readiness for the next stage of their education. Leaders need to make sure that the reading curriculum is well planned and sequenced, that teachers are trained and supported to teach reading well, and that teachers know what pupils need to learn from early years to Year 6.
- What children learn across the curriculum does not always build on prior learning. Subject leaders' knowledge in these subjects is weaker. The curriculum that is planned in these subjects is less well considered. Leaders need to continue to make sure that subject leaders are provided with the training and support to carry out their role effectively so that all subjects are well planned and taught.
- Leaders, including governors, do not ensure that monitoring of the curriculum leads to pupils being well prepared for the next stage of their learning. This means that some pupils move on to their next year group without the knowledge and skills that they need. Leaders, including governors, need to make sure that their monitoring of the curriculum identifies improvements more effectively and that those actions taken to address weaknesses are timely.

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	138209
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10207071
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	471
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Neil Williams
Headteacher	Stephen Fox
Website	www.ardleyhill.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 May 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Ardley Hill Primary School changed its status to a primary school in 2015. The school also converted to an academy status in the same year.
- The school became part of the Chiltern Learning Trust in October 2019.
- Leaders run a pre-school for two-year-olds five days a week.
- The school has a unit for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder.
- The proportion of pupils in receipt of education, health and care plans is above the national average.
- The school does not currently use 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 has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with senior leaders. This included the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, one of whom was a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Inspectors also met with the two other SENCos and the trust's chief executive officer (CEO) and school improvement partner.
- Inspectors met with three members of the local governing body (LGB), including the chair and vice-chair. Inspectors looked at trust and governor monitoring paperwork, including minutes of LGB meetings.
- Inspectors did deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, science, computing and physical education. They met with curriculum leaders and visited lessons. They reviewed pupils' work in these subjects, as well as speaking with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors heard pupils reading to adults who work in the school. They visited the playground and an assembly to learn about pupils' behaviour and personal development.
- The lead inspector looked at the arrangements for safeguarding. This included meeting with the designated safeguarding lead and the deputy designated safeguarding lead, and scrutinising the single central record and other safeguarding documentation.
- Inspectors considered 118 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and 116 free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the 30 responses to Ofsted's staff survey, and 30 responses from pupils to Ofsted's survey of their views.

Inspection team

Sharon Waldron, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jason Howard

Ofsted Inspector

Lynda Walker

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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