

Inspection of Academy 360

Portsmouth Road, Sunderland SR4 9BA

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 May 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Academy 360 is a much-improved school where everyone is valued. This is because of the strong strategic leadership of the Laidlaw Schools Trust and the determination of its staff. The quality of education is now good. Pupils are becoming aspirational and committed to their studies. The principal has successfully raised expectations. Both the primary and secondary phases of the school are working well.

Leaders have worked hard to keep the school on an even keel through the pandemic. The staff went above and beyond to keep vulnerable pupils safe. High levels of staff absence, at times, have meant behaviour has not always been good. However, leaders tackled this well. The school is calm and settled now. Pupils of all ages feel safe. They feel well supported by the pastoral staff. Pupils know they can get help if they feel anxious.

Relationships between staff and pupils are friendly and positive. There are well-established routines and procedures which keep the school calm and orderly. Some bullying happens occasionally. Pupils trust the staff to sort it out. The staff are tenacious and work hard to resolve any conflicts between pupils.

The school has been hit by the pandemic but leaders have skilfully navigated this without losing sight of what needed to improve. Extra-curricular activities have restarted. Visits out of school to places of interest are happening again. Sports events have largely resumed. Pupils say they enjoy school. The level of attendance is better now than before the pandemic.

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

In January 2018, the school joined the Laidlaw Schools Trust and made a fresh start. Leaders show clear vision and ambition and the trust has provided strong oversight. Subject leaders have received good support to develop their planning. Across the primary and secondary phases, curriculum plans are suitably ambitious. Knowledge has been carefully sequenced from year to year and within topics. In most year groups, pupils record a good level of detail in their workbooks. They typically highlight key vocabulary. In core subjects, teachers routinely revisit essential knowledge using techniques such as memory joggers. However, in some other subjects, teachers are just beginning to adopt the same approaches. Consequently, pupils' recall of knowledge in these subjects is generally weaker. Leaders have focused on ensuring pupils make a smooth transition from primary to secondary. For example, pupils' knowledge of spelling and grammar is built upon seamlessly across Years 5 to 8.

The secondary curriculum is successfully motivating pupils and raising their aspirations. However, in key stage 3, not all subjects are studied for three years. This means pupils' experience is shallower in these subjects than it should be. Although the proportion of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate has increased, it remains below average. Leaders are carefully removing barriers to raise numbers

further. Careers education has a high profile across both the primary and secondary phases. Pupils get to meet employers and training providers. The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. Most pupils are well prepared for their next steps when they leave school.

Leaders give the teaching of reading a high priority. All primary staff have expertise in the school's phonics programme. Some primary teachers also teach in the secondary phase, strengthening provision further. The phonics programme is richly resourced and well led. Children begin learning to read from the start of the Reception Year. Adults deliver phonics sessions consistently. Pupils take part actively. Adults ensure that pupils get books with words in that they know. Extra sessions are provided for pupils who fall behind. Strong leadership and the rigour of the programme are ensuring that pupils are making up lost ground.

Leaders ensure parents are involved in co-writing support plans for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers are supported well to implement these plans. Parents who have children in the specialist resource provision, known as the Hub, praised its work. One parent said: 'My son has made enormous progress since joining. I could not recommend the Hub and staff highly enough.'

Children make a good start in the early years. The curriculum focuses on language and communication from the start. Reading has a high priority. Taught sessions are purposefully delivered. Interactions between adults and children as they play are particularly effective. Staff are skilled at developing children's speech and language. The rich environment appeals to children's curiosity. For example, children could talk knowledgeably about their worm and snail hotels.

Over the last 18 months, the pandemic has affected standards of behaviour. Some pupils struggled with expectations and routines when they returned to school after periods when they were educated remotely. This year, the school has had weeks with high numbers of fixed-term suspensions, which coincided with periods of very high staff absence. Some staff would like poor behaviour dealt with more consistently. Leaders recognise that as school life returns to normal, greater consistency is required to tackle instances of poor behaviour. In recent months, suspensions have fallen significantly. The school is now calm and orderly. The staff have good routines and systems in place to manage pupils.

Provision for pupils' personal development is woven across the curriculum. The school teaches the statutory content about relationships and sex education and health education. Pupils feel the school is a place where it is alright to be different. Much has been done to teach pupils about healthy eating and exercise. There is good support available for pupils who feel anxious, including support from an external mentoring service via the school's 'Big Red Button' safeguarding system. There are good opportunities for pupils to visit places of interest. Plans are in place to enrich the timetable further from September, with increased wider opportunities.

The principal and other senior leaders are successfully unifying the school. Primary and secondary staff are increasingly working together as one team. Leaders have an honest and accurate picture of the school's performance. Leaders show strong moral purpose. They are inclusive in approach and want the best for all pupils. They take workload into account and have been flexible in their support of their staff. For example, changes have been made to the school's marking policy to reduce the burden on teachers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a team of specialist safeguarding staff, who respond quickly and effectively to the challenges presented. This ensures that pupils have trusted adults to go to if they are concerned. Safeguarding leaders know their vulnerable pupils well. They work closely and in partnership with a range of external agencies to keep them safe. Safeguarding leaders keep detailed records. The school's curriculum ensures pupils of different ages know about risks and how to keep themselves safe. For example, secondary pupils knew about consent, substance misuse and knife crime. Pupils can easily raise a concern via the red button on the school website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In key stage 3, pupils currently only study arts and design and technology subjects for two years. This means pupils' experience in these subjects is shallower than it should be. From September, leaders have plans to implement a different timetable that will allow them greater flexibility in curriculum design. Leaders should ensure that, over time, they establish greater breadth and depth across subjects in key stage 3, so that pupils receive a diet that at least matches the ambition of the national curriculum.
- Many pupils remember much of the knowledge they are taught. However, some pupils find it difficult to recall some essential ideas and concepts needed for further study. This is because, in some subjects, teachers are better than others at recapping and revisiting the most important knowledge. Leaders should support subject leaders to make sure teachers routinely use approaches to review and recap knowledge.
- The school's behaviour policy was revised last year. Some approaches to the use of rewards and sanctions have changed. A small minority of staff have reservations about the new approach. Leaders should do more to explain to the staff how they make decisions about the use of rewards and sanctions.

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	145477
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10227643
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	891
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Alan Hodgson
Principal	Rachel Donohue
Website	https://academy360.laidlawschoolstrust.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Academy 360 opened as a new entity when it joined the Laidlaw Schools Trust in January 2018.
- The school has additionally resourced provision for up to 36 pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties. This provision is known as the Hub. All places in the Hub are currently filled with pupils from the primary and secondary age ranges.
- Academy 360 currently places nine pupils in four registered alternative education providers on a full-time basis. These include Evolve Sports, The Link School, Beacon of Light and Consilium Evolve.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the principal, the head of primary and other senior leaders. Inspectors also met with a group of middle leaders and groups of teachers. Discussions were held with trustees and members of the governing body. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive and the head of secondary school improvement for the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, English, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans in other subjects and visited lessons in other subjects, including mathematics and geography. Inspectors also discussed aspects of teaching, learning and assessment with a group of middle leaders.
- Inspectors met different groups of pupils from both the primary and secondary phases to discuss safety, personal development, well-being and behaviour.
- An inspector met several pupils who have experienced sanctions and met a range of staff to explore their views about pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors met with leaders for safeguarding and reviewed records of the school's work to protect vulnerable pupils. An inspector looked at the record of vetting checks made on adults who work in the school.
- Inspectors considered responses to the staff and pupil surveys and responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

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