

Inspection of an outstanding school: Aspire

56 Amersham Hill, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP13 6PQ

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 June 2022

Outcome

Aspire continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have a deep understanding of pupils' needs. The whole staff team combines warmth and humanity with the highest expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour. Adults show pupils that they can be successful. Little by little, and with great care, staff gain pupils' trust. This plays a significant part in pupils' progress. Pupils learn to recognise their achievements. They grow in confidence and make plans for the future. For example, one pupil explained that she had not liked art before joining the school because she felt that she was 'no good at it'. Now she loves art and is rightly proud of her work.

Aspire's core principles of 'safe-love-learn' underpin the life and work of the school. Many pupils have been out of education for extended periods of time. Often, they feel that education has little to offer. The school's first priority is to make sure that pupils feel secure and valued, so that they are ready to learn. Pupils say that teachers help them to talk about their feelings and to sort out any problems. Leaders are alert to any concerns about bullying. They act swiftly wherever there are concerns about a pupil's safety.

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

Leaders have developed well-sequenced curriculum models to suit each site's focus. For example, some pupils attend Aspire on a short-term basis before returning to their main schools. The curriculum for these pupils focuses firmly on reading, writing and mathematics, as well as examination subjects. This approach is highly effective in addressing gaps in pupils' learning while making sure that they are prepared to re-join their main schools successfully. Other pupils attend Shortenills on a long-term basis. The curriculum is designed to ensure that these pupils learn a suitably broad range of subjects. Older pupils who attend Aspire's alternative provision study vocational subjects, such as mechanics, in addition to subjects such as English and mathematics. This ensures that they are well prepared for the future. Tuition for pupils with medical needs is responsive to each pupil's needs and circumstances. The curriculum prepares pupils on each site exceptionally well for the next stage of their education or future employment.

Leaders give reading a very high priority. Some pupils have missed key elements in learning to read when they join the school. Teachers identify gaps in pupils' knowledge quickly. They give extra help where needed and pupils make rapid progress as a result. Some pupils have made very significant gains in a relatively short space of time, both personally and academically. For example, during the inspection, one pupil had the confidence to read aloud in class for the first time since joining the school.

Teachers across Aspire adjust the curriculum skilfully to support pupils' varied needs. They use a wide range of different approaches to capture pupils' attention. Pupils usually behave exceptionally well in lessons. This is because adults set clear, high expectations. Well-established routines help pupils to feel secure. Sometimes pupils struggle to behave well. They become frustrated or anxious and lose focus. Adults respond quietly, calmly and without fuss when this is the case. Pupils respond well because they respect their teachers.

Pupils' personal development is a thread which runs throughout the curriculum and across all Aspire sites. The development of pupils' interests is central to the school's work and helps pupils to re-frame how they view themselves. Creativity sits at the heart of the school's curriculum, often providing a route for pupils to experience early success. The teaching of art is a particular strength in the school. Pupils' high-quality artwork is displayed with pride throughout the school.

The school provides a wide range of activities and experiences to supplement pupils' learning, from Islamic art workshops to rap music. Experiences such as these help pupils to discover new interests and develop ambitions. Pupils appreciate the school's role in helping them to make plans for the future, such as identifying courses of interest at sixth-form colleges.

Increasing numbers of pupils join Aspire having been out of education for significant periods of time. The school provides strong support for these pupils and is instrumental in re-engaging them with learning. Some pupils attend on a part-time basis because of their needs and circumstances. Leaders continue to work with the local authority to ensure that all pupils have access to their entitlement to full-time education.

Staff feel well supported by leaders. They report high staff morale and strong teamwork. Parents are highly positive about the school's work. All those who completed Ofsted's survey are pleased with the quality of support for their children's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One said, 'If it wasn't for this school, my child would not have been in education for the last two years, let alone take his exams'. Another commented, 'This school has saved my son and shown him a future'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Ensuring pupils' safety is central to the school's work. Leaders ensure that all sites follow the same rigorous safeguarding procedures. All sites are secure, with robust systems in place to keep pupils safe, including secure access arrangements.

Leaders use ongoing training and briefings to update staff about safeguarding issues. Staff are very knowledgeable about policies and procedures as a result. They are alert to pupils' welfare and raise any concerns about pupils' safety quickly. Leaders take prompt action to ensure pupils' safety. They work constructively with agencies, such as social care and the police, wherever appropriate.

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 first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, The Wycombe Grange Pupil Referral Unit, to be outstanding in July 2014.

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	143574
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10238341
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Academy alternative provision converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	252
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Elizabeth Hutton
Headteacher	Debra Rutley
Website	www.aspireap.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school operates from five sites across Buckinghamshire:
 - The Wycombe Grange, CSEC (Chiltern Skills and Enterprise Centre) and Blueprint are alternative provision schools. They provide education for pupils who have been permanently excluded and for pupils who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools.
 - Shortenills provides full-time, long-term education for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. All have an education, health and care plan (EHCP).
 - Orchard House provides part-time, short-term education for pupils with mental health difficulties.
 - The school also provides part-time home tuition for pupils who are unable to attend school due to medical reasons.
 - The school provides outreach support to local schools for pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion, as well as supporting reintegration into mainstream school.

- Some pupils are dual rolled with Aspire and with their main schools. Some are attending Aspire on a part-time basis.
- Pupils have a range of additional needs, including behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and autism. Some have medical needs. Most pupils have SEND and most have an EHCP.
- The leadership team has been restructured since the predecessor school was inspected. A head of school has been appointed to each site. An executive headteacher was appointed in April 2021.
- The school makes use of three alternative providers. Two of these are not registered with Ofsted.
- Aspire converted to become an academy school in April 2018. When its predecessor school, The Wycombe Grange Pupil Referral Unit, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer, executive headteacher, heads of school and other members of staff. The lead inspector met with four trustees, including the chair of the trust. She also had a telephone discussion with the local authority's director of education.
- Inspectors spoke with parents by telephone. They also considered the views expressed by parents and staff via Ofsted's surveys.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, talked with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally in lessons and at various times during the school day.
- The lead inspector reviewed a range of safeguarding documents, including the single central record. She also met with the school's designated safeguarding lead and reviewed the school's safeguarding records.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Dan Lambert

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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