

Inspection of a good school: The Aspire Academy

Bridgwater Road, Worcester, Worcestershire, WR4 9FQ

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 June 2023

Outcome

The Aspire Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders know that for many of their pupils, education has been difficult in the past, so they work hard to give them a fresh start. Staff create a safe, positive and nurturing environment. They take the time to get to know the pupils well. Adults seize every opportunity, such as chatting over lunch, to build trusting and positive relationships. Pupils appreciate this and say that coming to this school has made them feel that they 'matter'.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils. They place a strong emphasis on celebrating pupils' personal development and academic achievements. At the end of every day, pupils and staff come together to acknowledge pupils' successes in the 'special mentions' assembly. During their time at the school, many pupils achieve a range of qualifications and build their resilience and self-esteem. Most pupils are well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils can sometimes display challenging behaviours. At times, there is the potential for these behaviours to disrupt learning, but adults act quickly and intelligently to calm any issues before they escalate. This all helps to create a calm and orderly environment. If bullying happens, most pupils are confident that staff will 'sort it' and not allow it to spread.

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

Pupils often have negative attitudes towards learning when they join the school. Leaders know this, and they do not use it as an excuse to lower their expectations of pupils. They ensure, for example, that pupils study a wide range of subjects that build logically over time.

Leaders combine a range of academic and vocational qualifications into an individual pathway for each pupil. These pathways complement pupils' interests and hopes for the future. In addition, many pupils have opportunities to participate in activities designed to build their confidence and social skills. These planned opportunities include work

experience and volunteering in the local community. All of this means that by the time they leave the school, most pupils are well prepared for their next steps.

When pupils join the school, adults make a wide range of checks on what pupils can do. Leaders use these checks to spot gaps in pupils' learning. In most cases, staff use this information. For example, teachers use the information to make sure that the work they give pupils is well matched to their needs. As part of these checks, leaders also identify pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. Leaders make sure that these pupils get additional support. However, this support is not always effective. Some staff lack the knowledge to teach reading well and to overcome the barriers that impede some pupils' learning. This means that these pupils are not catching up quickly enough.

Pupils behave well in most lessons. They listen carefully to their teachers and are keen to join in. Teachers keep a close eye on pupils' learning. They spot when pupils are stuck and act swiftly to give them the help they need. Pupils greatly appreciate this and say it is making a positive difference to their learning.

Most pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For many pupils, this relates to their social, emotional and mental health. Leaders assess these needs accurately on entry. This results in targeted one-to-one support, such as art therapy, for some pupils. However, leaders do not systematically review and evaluate the effectiveness of this targeted support. This limits leaders' ability to identify whether the support they have put in place is working as they intended and whether further adaptations are needed.

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is strong. As part of this work, pupils learn about different religions and viewpoints. In addition, leaders ensure that pupils regularly benefit from a wide range of high-quality opportunities to engage with local employers and training providers.

Leaders have created a culture where staff feel valued and part of a team. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders create a culture where all staff take their safeguarding responsibilities and pupils' welfare seriously. Leaders ensure that staff know pupils' vulnerabilities and are vigilant in looking for the signs that pupils may need additional help. Staff report any concerns swiftly. When required, leaders take timely action to ensure that pupils get the help they need from appropriate agencies.

Leaders place a high priority on giving pupils the information and support they need to help them keep themselves safe. As part of this work, pupils learn about the most significant risks they may face, including criminal exploitation.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not ensure that pupils who are at the earliest stages of reading get the help they need. This means that gaps in pupils' phonic knowledge persist and they are not catching up quickly enough. Leaders should ensure that these pupils receive the help they need to become more confident and fluent readers.
- Leaders do not systematically check and review the impact of the interventions they implement to support pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. This limits leaders' ability to identify quickly what is working well and whether changes are needed to support pupils further. Leaders should ensure that they routinely monitor, review and evaluate the interventions they have in place and take action to adapt these interventions where needed, according to what they find.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2017.

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.

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	141034
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	10226904
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	121
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Phil Collins
Headteacher	Simon Stevenson
Website	www.theaspireacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 and 4 May 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The academy admits pupils in key stages 3 and 4 who have been excluded, are at risk of permanent exclusion or who have become disengaged from learning. Many pupils have experienced disruption to their education.
- All pupils have specific needs associated with previous schooling or personal circumstances. Most have social, emotional or mental health needs.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 carried out deep dives in English, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders and teachers, visited a sample of lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke with some pupils about their learning.
- Through discussions with leaders, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how effectively pupils are safeguarded. They also looked at documents related to safeguarding, including records of pre-employment checks carried out before staff are appointed.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of different classes and at different times of the day. They talked to pupils informally about bullying, behaviour and extra-curricular opportunities. Inspectors also observed during informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding arrangements and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments.

Inspection team

Christopher Stevens, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Heather Davies

Ofsted Inspector

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