

Inspection of Pool Academy

Church Road, Pool, Redruth, Cornwall TR15 3PZ

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 September 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

The principal of this school is Nick Ward. This school is part of Athena Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Benjamin Parnell, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Elaine Marshall.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has recently undergone significant change. This has raised expectations for pupils' behaviour and learning. However, many older pupils have not responded well to this. Some pupils struggle to meet expectations. Many pupils have negative attitudes towards school.

Pupils feel safe at school and value the strong pastoral support they receive. The morning greeting helps pupils to have a positive start to the day. Pupils learn in quiet and calm classrooms, from a well-planned curriculum. There are clear routines in place, which helps many pupils to learn without distraction. Pupils say that bullying is not a significant problem.

Pupils enjoy many opportunities to enrich their learning. They particularly value the variety of sports on offer to help them to develop their talents. Older pupils are proud of their leadership responsibilities.

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

The school, with support from the trust, has developed the curriculum to improve weak academic outcomes. The impact of this work is not yet reflected in the school's published outcomes. In some subjects, younger pupils are beginning to know and remember more. They build on prior learning. Teachers provide clear explanations. Teachers check that pupils understand before they move on. The school supplements the curriculum for older pupils with additional, targeted support. This is because some pupils have not learned content well and have gaps in their knowledge.

The school's curriculum is becoming more ambitious. For example, to encourage pupils to learn a language for longer, leaders have prioritised improvements to the key stage 3 curriculum for Spanish. However, most pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not study the full range of subjects within the English Baccalaureate.

The school ensures, through a tutor reading programme, that all pupils read outside of lessons. The school identifies struggling readers and supports them to catch up. However, this has not improved pupils' enjoyment of reading. Many pupils do not speak positively about reading.

The school has developed support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school intends that all pupils with SEND learn the curriculum alongside their peers. Leaders ensure that teachers have the information they need to make adaptations. However, a significant number of pupils with SEND currently struggle to follow the school's new approach to managing behaviour. As a result, a disproportionate number of pupils with SEND receive sanctions that impact on their learning.

The recent change to the behaviour policy has improved low-level disruption. As a result, classrooms are purposeful, and pupils can focus on their work. Staff reward pupils for good work and behaviour. However, the new behaviour policy causes some pupils frustration and a sense of injustice.

Pupils learn about protected characteristics. They learn about tolerance and respect. However, derogatory language is used, and pupils report that it sometimes remains unchallenged. Pupils learn about how to stay physically and mentally healthy. They learn about different kinds of relationships and how to stay safe. However, some pupils do not remember important knowledge to support their personal development.

Other aspects of the school's work to develop character are stronger. For example, increasing numbers of pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Combined Cadet Force. All pupils receive information about their next steps. Pupils in Year 10 all undertake work placements. They are very positive about this, including the support they receive from teachers.

The school is undergoing rapid change. Leaders at all levels are addressing its weaknesses. The new behaviour policy has caused a significant number of people in the school community, and beyond, to challenge the school. Governors and trustees provide constructive support and challenge, but the engagement with the wider school community remains a significant challenge for the school and trust.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Many of the improvements to the school's curriculum are newly implemented. There is some impact for younger pupils, but this is not yet widespread. Older pupils have gaps in their knowledge. The school and trust must ensure there is a sharp and sustained focus on implementation to improve outcomes so that all pupils are well prepared for their next steps.
- The school has faced significant challenge from its local community around the action it has taken to reduce low-level disruption in lessons. As a result, a number of pupils and parents are frustrated about how behaviour is being managed and unsupportive of the changes. The school and trust must ensure they communicate effectively with all stakeholders about changes at the school.
- Some pupils, especially those with SEND and those who are disadvantaged, are struggling to adapt to the school's expectations of them. As a result, a significant number receive sanctions. This has an impact on their learning. The school must ensure it supports pupils to manage their behaviour effectively and meet expectations so that all pupils benefit from the curriculum.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136614
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	10256666
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	634
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Elaine Marshall
Principal	Nick Ward
Website	www.poolacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 June 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average secondary school.
- The school joined Athena Learning Trust on 1 September 2023.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers and two unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 11 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- On the first day of inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, science, geography and modern foreign languages.
- The lead inspector analysed 147 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors also considered the views of pupils and staff in Ofsted’s online surveys.
- Inspectors also spoke with groups of pupils, as well as talking to them in lessons and during social times.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and reviewed documentation related to safeguarding and referrals to the local authority. They also spoke to staff about how they keep pupils safe.
- An inspector also met with the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator and discussed how pupils with SEND are identified and supported.
- Inspectors met with staff who oversee the personal development and behaviour of pupils.
- Inspectors also met with members of the school improvement team from Athena Learning Trust.
- The lead inspector met with members of the board of trustees, the local governing body and the chief executive officer of Athena Learning Trust.

Inspection team

Victoria Griffin, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Mark Burgess	Ofsted Inspector
Leanne Thirlby	His Majesty’s Inspector

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