

Inspection of Dame Alice Owen's School

Dugdale Hill Lane, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire EN6 2DU

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 December 2023

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Hannah Nemko. This school is the only school in Dame Alice Owen's School Academy Trust. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mr Gary Haigh.

What is it like to attend this school?

Dame Alice Owen's school is a wonderful place to come to learn. It supports pupils to become independent and resilient individuals. There is a palpable sense of community here, where pupils from all backgrounds thrive.

The school has high aspirations for its pupils. The curriculum is ambitious right from the very first day pupils arrive. Teachers are passionate about what they teach and the pupils enjoy what they learn. Teachers carefully think about the best way to teach all their pupils. This means that pupils achieve exceptionally well.

Expectations for behaviour are very high. Pupils say that it is 'cool to do well here'. They show considerable enthusiasm for their learning. In all year groups, pupils are supportive of each other. Sixth-form students help their younger peers by practising reading with them.

Pupils can enjoy a high-quality range of opportunities. These include politics society, chess, chamber choir and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. These are very well attended by pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school ensures that there are many ways in which every child can represent the school in music, sport and academic competitions.

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

The school's curriculum is carefully planned. It is ambitious and challenging. Teachers are highly skilled at adapting the learning to meet the needs of their pupils. This ensures that pupils at all levels are challenged. Almost all pupils study an academic curriculum, with many taking languages at GCSE. Students in the sixth-form study ideas and concepts well beyond the A-Level curriculum.

Teachers are experts in the subjects that they teach. They explain new learning clearly so that pupils can build on what they already know. Teachers check pupils' understanding systematically. They use this checking to ensure that they can identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers then give precise guidance to ensure that this knowledge is learned. As a result, pupils make excellent progress.

Leaders prioritise ensuring that all pupils can read fluently. Pupils are regularly assessed to check their reading ability. Leaders ensure that the weakest readers receive the support that they need to improve their fluency and comprehension. As a result, their reading improves. A culture of reading is promoted across the school. Pupils are confident and can articulate their ideas well. This is because leaders develop speaking and listening throughout the curriculum and encourage pupils to articulate clearly what they know and remember.

Pupils with SEND access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. They achieve highly because their teachers know their individual needs and apply effective strategies to support them.

Pupils' conduct around the building is exemplary. Learning is seldom interrupted by poor behaviour. They are enthusiastic about all aspects of their life at the school. Consequently, pupils are keen to attend school and take part in all that it has to offer.

The personal development programme is extensive. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about important areas of life in contemporary society, including relationships education. Pupils learn how to make a positive contribution and they aspire to improve the world around them. Leaders ensure that there are a number of opportunities for pupils to make a valued contribution to the school and local community. Pupils raise money for causes that are important to them. Leaders ensure that all pupils can access a wide range of opportunities and experiences. This develops their leadership skills and confidence.

Leaders are successful in finding extra funding to help some pupils access opportunities like trips and music tuition. This ensures that pupils' financial background is not a barrier to their success. Similarly, sixth-form students engage in the many extra-curricular and leadership opportunities. They are excellent role models for younger pupils.

Pupils receive a comprehensive careers education. All pupils receive impartial advice to make informed choices about their next steps. A high proportion of pupils progress to higher education. Many are successful in their applications to the most selective universities and courses.

Leaders are relentless in their ambition. Governors know the school exceptionally well. They provide a wide range of skills and experience. Governors regularly visit the school and speak to pupils about their school experiences to find out for themselves the differences the school's actions are making. This helps governors provide an equal balance of support and holding leaders effectively to account.

Staff overwhelming feel well cared for by the school. Staff are supportive of each other and enjoy what they do.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 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	136554
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255029
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,476
Appropriate authority	Dame Alice Owen's School Academy Trust
Chair of trustees	Gary Haigh
Headteacher	Hannah Nemko
Website	www.damealiceowens.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Dame Alice Owen's School became an academy in April 2011. The predecessor school of the same name was judged Outstanding in May 2009.
- The school uses three alternative providers, one of which is unregistered.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement 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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, staff and pupils. Inspectors met with the chair of governors, and other governors. As part of evaluating governance, the lead inspector met the chair of the trust, and other trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history, modern foreign languages, art and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, met with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects, including textiles and economics.
- As part of evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with leaders, governors, staff and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. They considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including curriculum plans, school development plans, policies and documentation for behaviour and attendance.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were considered through discussions and a review of Ofsted's surveys, including Ofsted Parent View. The inspection team also considered correspondence that was given to inspectors during the inspection.

Inspection team

Andrew Robinson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Cox	Ofsted Inspector
Al Mistrano	His Majesty's Inspector
Sharon Pritchard	Ofsted Inspector
Sally Nutman	Ofsted Inspector

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