

# Inspection of Discovery Academy

Discovery Drive, Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST2 0GA

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Inspection dates: 16 and 17 April 2024

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Good

The principal of this school is Jayne Schofield. This school is part of Alpha Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Simon French, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Kate Townshend.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils enjoy coming to this very inclusive school. They feel safe because they have absolute confidence that staff are there to help and support them whatever the problem might be.

Pupils say that expectations of their behaviour and academic achievement have risen significantly over the last year. The vast majority of pupils strive to meet them and appreciate the rewards they gain when they do so. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and respectful. Pupils are usually considerate of each other. They care about their peers and are eager to help when needed. This is reflected in the many pupils involved in leadership roles, such as mentoring and reading buddies.

Classrooms are calm environments for learning. An ambitious curriculum is in place across all subjects. However, curriculum delivery is stronger in some areas than others. This means that sometimes, pupils are less interested in learning and do not do as well as they could.

Pupils have increasingly high aspirations. These are well supported through the focus on providing a wide range of cultural and social experiences for all. Pupils speak with excitement of the trips, clubs and visitors to the school that help them shape their ambitions and focus their learning.

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

The new principal, well supported by the trust, has driven a rigorous programme of improvement, with the well-being and achievement of pupils at the centre of decision-making.

A well-organised, ambitious curriculum is in place and staff training is carefully designed to support its delivery. However, some aspects of this training are taking time to translate into classroom practice. For instance, assessment is planned and carried out well, but is not consistently used to provide accurate feedback to pupils to help them learn more. This means that some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not always make the progress that they could.

In some subjects, teachers do not have the confidence to plan and use a range of strategies in the classroom to ensure that pupils are increasingly asked to practise their learning independently. In these cases, pupils are too reliant on their teachers to tell them precisely what to do and when. Consequently, pupils can lack the confidence to identify the learning they need to recall and apply in a range of situations, including in examinations.

Pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans are supported very well. All pupils with SEND have suitable support plans in place. However, the school is aware

that to make the best use of these, further training is needed to ensure that strategies, as well as resources, are effectively matched to needs.

A well-designed reading programme is established across the school. All pupils are actively encouraged to read for enjoyment as well as explicitly taught the skills to read for learning. Those who need additional help are quickly identified and suitable support put in place. As a result, these pupils make rapid progress.

Attendance is a focus in this school. Leaders have developed a comprehensive policy and process to secure steady improvement, year on year. Leaders know who is struggling with attendance and more importantly, why they are struggling. This means that pupils are actively supported to attend through a wide range of incentives and interventions.

As a direct result of the higher expectations set over the last year, the improvement in behaviour secured has led to rapidly declining numbers of suspensions and permanent exclusions.

Personal development has a high priority in the school. The programme has been thoughtfully refined and reviewed to ensure that it has the ability to 'flex' where national or local events need to be addressed. The trust has implemented a 'universal character development programme' of nine experiences each year that all pupils participate in, including trips, team building, theatre and restaurant visits. Leaders are adamant that every pupil must have the social and cultural understanding to broaden their experience and raise their aspiration.

Careers education is well planned, beginning in Year 7 with visits to universities. Pupils value the information provided about qualifications, providers and career routes.

The collegial approach to leadership at this school has had a rapid impact on addressing some significant historical issues. Pupil and community engagement has been central to improvement planning and this is paying dividends. Pupils feel valued and nurtured. Parents and carers have recognised and appreciated the work to radically improve the school.

Staff work very hard, but they feel well supported and that their well-being is important to leaders.

Governors and trustees know the academy well. The trust vision and ethos is well understood and promoted effectively. They are clear about their roles and responsibilities and provide an effective balance of support and challenge.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Assessment information is not used well enough. As a result, feedback for pupils is not always helpful or followed up by teachers. This means that pupils, including those with SEND, do not make the progress they should. The school should ensure that assessment information is consistently used to provide accurate feedback to ensure that pupils always know what to do to improve, and that they are supported to do it.
- In some subjects, teachers are not confident enough to make use of teaching strategies that foster pupil independence. This limits pupils' ability to apply what they have learned when they do not have recourse to teacher instruction. The school should ensure that teachers are supported to develop their pedagogical repertoire and their confidence to use it.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136681
<b>Local authority</b>	Stoke-on-Trent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10322825
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy special sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,456
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Kate Townshend
<b>Principal</b>	Jayne Schofield
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://discovery.alphaacademiestrust.co.uk/">https://discovery.alphaacademiestrust.co.uk/</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	22 and 23 January 2019

## Information about this school

- The school is part of Alpha Academies Trust.
- The school uses four registered alternative providers.
- The school uses four unregistered alternative providers.
- 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 spoke with the principal, vice-principals, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, members of the local governing board, including the chair, members of the board of trustees, including the chair, and the chief executive officer for the trust.
- Inspectors also spoke to teachers, support staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, geography and art. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed the whole school reading curriculum as part of the English deep dive.
- Inspectors made brief visits to a range of lessons in other subjects and to inclusion and welfare provisions around the school.
- Inspectors reviewed the personal development curriculum, spoke with the leader of this aspect of provision and visited form time sessions.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including leaders' plans to improve the school and their self-evaluation of the school's work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

### Inspection team

Mel Ford, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Tim Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Arkle	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Grady	Ofsted Inspector
Nicola Beech	His Majesty's Inspector
Simon Smith	Ofsted Inspector

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