

Inspection of Aspire Academy

Frome Road, Odd Down, Bath BA2 5RF

Inspection dates: 23 to 24 April 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

The headteacher of this school is Helen McDicken. This school is part of the Futura Learning Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Andrea Arlidge, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Malcolm Broad.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils learn how to be enthusiastic and successful learners at this school. For many pupils, this contrasts with their previous experience of education. Careful consideration of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) shapes the school's curriculum design. With appropriate support from skilled staff, pupils achieve the school's aspirations. Effective use of praise, encouragement and challenge means that individual pupils' needs are well met.

Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Staff know pupils well. Pupils feel safe and most are keen to attend school regularly. Staff help pupils to develop the tools to recognise and express their emotions effectively. Pupils trust staff to listen and help them when needed.

As part of their personal and social development, pupils explore what it means to be part of a community. This begins with school activities such as fundraising for charities and camping together. Career guidance and work experience help pupils to learn important life skills that prepare them well for adulthood.

Increased expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour are raising standards. The highly individualised curriculum ensures that pupils gain recognised qualifications before moving on to college or employment post-16. Pupils know that practice helps them to learn and reach their potential.

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

The Futura Learning Partnership is currently working with the North Star Academy Trust to develop the school's offer for pupils with SEND. Significant changes to the school's curriculum and behaviour expectations have had a substantial and positive impact on pupils' development in a short time. The newly formed leadership team has carefully considered how to ensure these changes are manageable for staff, well understood by staff and sustainable. Checks on school development priorities are frequent and accurate. Consequently, there is an ambitious and shared vision for school improvement.

The school focuses on ensuring pupils are ready to learn. A sequenced curriculum that identifies what pupils must know and remember from Reception Year to Year 12 is now in place. Staff adapt the curriculum to match pupils' personal, social and emotional needs as set out in their education, health and care (EHC) plan. This includes working with a range of external agencies to meet pupils' needs. The school's curriculum is ambitious and the number of subjects growing to offer pupils more options. This academic year, pupils are completing GCSE qualifications.

The school expects all pupils to learn to read well. Pupils who need additional support to secure their phonics knowledge are identified swiftly. Teachers' understanding of how to develop pupils' phonics knowledge is secure. They use this to check pupils' pronunciation of phonemes successfully. Reading books match

pupils' phonics knowledge appropriately. Where pupils have secure phonics knowledge, they read with accuracy and fluency. Staff support pupils to develop their reading comprehension by sharing and discussing high-quality texts. This also helps pupils to develop their social and emotional skills and knowledge.

Staff check what pupils can do and remember. In some subjects, staff use this information effectively to plan appropriate learning activities. For example, in English and mathematics. The school is developing techniques to help pupils to remember long-term as pupils have gaps in their knowledge, skills and vocabulary across the wider curriculum. The gaps in pupils' knowledge are not closing as quickly in some of these subjects. This is because subject leadership and the use of assessment information are not as well developed in the wider curriculum.

The school has worked relentlessly to embed routines and raise expectations for pupils' learning behaviour. This can be seen in the calm and purposeful learning environments. Pupils' behaviour and attendance have significantly improved over the past year. Pupils' social and emotional needs are woven into lesson structure and content. Adults are skilled and change learning activities when necessary to re-engage pupils in their learning. The school's approach to behaviour management helps pupils to increase their understanding of what they are feeling and their ability to explain themselves. This work is successful.

The school prepares pupils for life in modern Britain well. Pupils learn that it is okay to have different opinions. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online and in the community. This includes how to form positive and healthy relationships. Leaders seek advice from external agencies and value their input to secure support for pupils and their families. Pupils' safety and welfare sit at the heart of the school's work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Improvements to assessment in the wider curriculum are very recent and have not had time to have an impact on pupils' gaps in knowledge. In a few subjects, pupils do not always learn as well as they could. The school must continue its work to refine assessment so that learning builds on what pupils already know and closes gaps in knowledge across the wider curriculum.
- Subject leadership is not fully developed across the wider curriculum. Therefore, the school does not have sufficient oversight of the impact wider curriculum subjects have on pupils' learning. The school needs to develop the effectiveness of subject leadership to ensure pupils know more, remember more and can do more across the wider 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

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| Unique reference number | 140677 |
| Local authority | Bath and North East Somerset Council |
| Inspection number | 10298020 |
| Type of school | Special School |
| School category | Academy special sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 99 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Malcolm Broad |
| CEO of the trust | Andrea Arlidge |
| Headteacher | Helen McDicken |
| Website | www.aspireacademy.org.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 22 to 23 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- Aspire Academy is a special school supporting children and young people aged 4 to 19 with education, health and care (EHC) plans. The predominant needs are social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Most pupils have more than one identified SEND.
- Admission to the school is commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset (BANES), South Gloucestershire, Bristol and Wiltshire local authorities.
- Aspire became an academy in April 2014 and is a Futura Learning Partnership school.
- North Star Academy Trust was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to work with the Futura Learning Partnership in 2023.
- The interim headteacher from North Star Academy Trust has been in post since June 2023.
- The school uses 14 unregistered alternative provisions.

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. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in the evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders, staff, pupils and governors, including the chair of the governing body and the deputy CEO of Futura Learning Partnership.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO of the North Star Academy Trust and the school's improvement partner from the North Star Academy Trust.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with the BANES local authority representative and the alternative provision used by the school.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a known adult.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal social and health education (PSHE). For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also discussed the school's curriculum and provision with leaders.
- The inspectors observed pupils during social times and spoke with pupils and leaders about opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. She also took into consideration the responses to the survey for staff.

Inspection team

Marie Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Teresa Hill

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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