

# Inspection of Ardley Hill Academy

Lowther Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 3NZ

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Inspection dates: 16 and 17 July 2024

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher is Stephen Fox. This school is part of Chiltern Learning Trust, a multi-academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Adrian Rogers, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Graham Pryor.

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

Pupils endeavour to embody the school's 'REACH' values: resilience, engagement, aspiration, communication, and health. They relish the five-step reward programme. It includes receiving a certificate at the 'REACH' assembly or sharing a pizza with the headteacher. Pupils and their families appreciate this approach. It boosts pupils' happiness and sense of being a valued member of the school community.

There are increasing opportunities for pupils to be community minded. The 'safeguarding squad', for example, look out for others. They let trusted adults know if a peer is unhappy or behaving inappropriately. There is also well-thought-through pastoral support. It helps vulnerable pupils express their wishes and feelings. Having peers and adults in school who want to help them, keeps pupils safe.

The curriculum is continuously being updated. The teaching of it helps pupils to develop a broad understanding across various subjects. For instance, by Year 1 in computing, pupils learn basic keyboard skills for formatting text. While, by Year 4 in history, they grasp concepts like 'civilisation' and 'invasion'. This approach focuses on improving pupils' vocabulary and understanding of key ideas and skills. It prepares pupils more effectively for their next steps.

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

Leaders have made significant efforts to rebuild the school's relationship with parents and the local community. Many parents appreciate the ongoing improvements. The high turnout at the bonfire night event demonstrated strong support. It highlighted a new era of unity and the school's commitment to bring people together.

The school is currently refining its curriculum. The trust helps the school receive support from subject experts. They assist school-based leaders with developments. The school uses high-quality schemes of work. Leaders determine the most effective teaching and assessment methods. For instance, to ensure pupil success, staff first model the tasks. They then complete one together. This way, when pupils work independently, they know what to do.

Pupils often excel in reading. This is because the school diligently implements its phonics and reading programmes. Leaders work with care to train staff. In the Nursery Year, many children can identify letter sounds, pointing to them on their sound charts. This strong foundation helps pupils to read and spell words accurately as they progress through key stage 1. Still, a few pupils struggle with fluent and expressive reading. Some staff lack the expertise to offer effective assistance. When staff ask pupils to re-read, they tend to repeat the same slow, monotonous reading. Leaders recognised this issue before the inspection. But the plan to address this is yet to take effect.

There has been a recent increase in the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school is managing this well. There is early identification, monitoring and regular review of support plans involving parents and external agencies. Most parents appreciate these efforts. Leaders provide comprehensive staff training. This includes for pupils with more complex needs. There is clear evidence of pupil progress. For example, improvements in letter formation and sentence writing. But inconsistencies in staff support sometimes mean that some pupils with SEND do not progress as well as they might.

Pupils generally show calm and focused behaviour. They mirror the behaviour staff model and reinforce through praise and rewards. Minor behaviour issues sometimes arise. Leaders equip staff with strategies and resources to manage these incidents well. The school makes every effort to ensure regular attendance. Staff use the minibus to transport pupils, and interactions with the therapy dog, Hope, provide a positive start to the day. Regular attendance helps pupils understand school routines and keep up with lessons.

The school takes pride in its personal development programme. It has grown and improved since the last inspection. For instance, the trust facilitates opportunities for sports competitions and participation. The presence of a swimming pool on-site provides great benefit to pupils. Regular swimming lessons teach many essential skills for water safety and fitness. Additionally, well-planned educational trips add to learning experiences. For example, Year 2 recently visited a castle to expand their knowledge of monarchs. Moreover, there are frequent performance opportunities. These include performing in nearby auditoriums. These experiences help pupils improve their confidence, public speaking and display their creativity.

Governance, at both local and at trust level, provides a positive impact at the school. Rigorous safeguarding audits ensure tenacity in how the school supports vulnerable pupils. Networking opportunities provided by the trust have improved the curriculum and its teaching. Staff appreciate leaders' interpersonal skills and their ability to manage change well. This has created a positive working environment.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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

- Although leaders have plans, the support provided is not effectively improving reading fluency and expression for the weaker readers, which affects their comprehension. The school should offer staff the necessary training to help these pupils read confidently and proficiently.

- The school's current approach to supporting pupils with SEND varies in its effectiveness. While some methods, such as clear explanations and demonstrations, help pupils showcase their knowledge, this level of support is not consistently applied across all pupils and subjects. The school should strengthen its strategies to ensure that all pupils with SEND receive the support they need to achieve their very best.

## 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>	138209
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10323718
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	471
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Graham Pryor
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Adrian Rogers
<b>Headteacher</b>	Stephen Fox
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ardleyhill.org.uk">www.ardleyhill.org.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	22 and 23 February 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school offers nursery provision. Two-year-olds can attend a morning session, for 15 hours. For three-year-olds, the school offers both 15-hour and 30-hour weekly programmes.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. The trust, in agreement with the local authority, will be closing this in July 2025. Currently, there are no pupils due to be on roll in the specially resourced provision in September 2024.
- There is before- and after-school childcare for pupils who attend the school. The school runs this.
- The school currently engages the services of two unregistered alternative providers of education.

## 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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with trust leaders, including the CEO, deputy CEO, director of school improvement, director of SEND and safeguarding, director of the teaching school and one of the primary lead practitioners deployed to work in the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with school leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, special educational needs and disabilities coordinator and three local governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, computing and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To further inspect the curriculum, inspectors explored provision in the early years, support for pupils with SEND and three other subjects: science, art and physical education.
- 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.
- Inspectors reviewed school documentation, including the school development plan, self-evaluation form, minutes from a meeting of the local governing body and a report of a quality assurance review.
- Inspectors considered the responses to surveys. These included 60 responses to the staff survey, 87 responses to the pupil survey and 169 responses, including 98 free-text responses, to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also held separate discussions with pupils, parents and staff.

## Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Emma Breckenridge	Ofsted Inspector
Wayne Jarvis	Ofsted Inspector

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