

The Aylesbury Vale Academy

Paradise Orchard, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP18 0WS

Inspection dates

23–24 November 2016

| Overall effectiveness | Inadequate |
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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Inadequate |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for pupils | Inadequate |
| Early years provision | Requires improvement |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Require improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Too many pupils fail to make adequate progress, especially in the secondary phase of the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not do as well as other pupils nationally.
- Weak standards in the past were not addressed quickly enough. The sponsor and governors were too slow to intervene even when poor performance was obvious.
- Until recently, too many pupils missed too much time, or were late to school and lessons.
- Pupils report that behaviour was frequently unacceptable and disrupted their learning.
- Too much teaching has little impact on pupils' ability to learn.
- Although pupils are safeguarded inside the school, there are weaknesses in the recording of actions taken to ensure the safety of pupils elsewhere.
- Many children in the early years make slower progress than they should.
- Students undertaking 16 to 19 study programmes do not have access to good-quality work experience placements.
- Students following academic programmes of study in the sixth form do not do as well as they should.
- Governors do not hold leaders to account or exercise their statutory duty to ensure that required information is published accurately on the website.

The school has the following strengths

- The new, highly effective executive principal, who joined the school in April 2016, understands the scale of the school's problems.
- There is growing strength in the wider leadership team.
- The new executive principal has already tackled successfully poor attendance, punctuality and unacceptable behaviour.
- Teaching is good or better in pockets of each phase of the school.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school has serious weaknesses, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise outcomes for pupils in all key stages so that they are consistently better than national averages and that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally closes rapidly.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all parts of the school by:
 - sharing the strong practice that exists already in isolated pockets across each phase
 - continuing the process begun in April 2016 of tackling teachers' weaker performance, especially in the secondary phase
 - implementing focused, rigorous staff performance management and effective, purposeful training.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the whole school so that there are consistent policies, procedures and practices from the Nursery provision right the way to the top by:
 - reforming the governing body so that it is able to hold school leaders regularly and rigorously to account, as well as providing appropriate support to the new executive principal
 - clarifying leadership and management responsibilities
 - establishing school-wide leaders for safeguarding, assessment and staff training, and for supporting groups of pupils facing potential barriers to learning
 - creating school-wide practice in, among other things, safeguarding, assessment, teachers' professional learning and the management of practice for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken by a professional team independent of the sponsor and the local authority.

An external review of governance should also be undertaken, commissioned by the sponsors but carried out by persons independent of current governors and the local authority.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Until April 2016, most aspects of leadership and management were ineffective. Standards declined over time and were not addressed.
- Leadership roles and responsibilities across the school are not clear enough. For example, there are separate members of staff for safeguarding in the primary and secondary phases. Of most concern is the presence of a coordinator for special educational needs and/or disabilities in the secondary phase, and a separate inclusion manager in the primary phase. The latter is not a member of the school's senior leadership team. This is out of step with government policy.
- Currently, other leadership functions are similarly duplicated in the primary and secondary phases. This is neither cost-effective nor efficient, and does not represent good value for money. It also means that accountability is difficult to pursue. Sometimes less effective leaders deflect responsibility for underperformance to others in the school.
- Parents and most of the staff see the school as two separate schools. Many parents of primary phase pupils refer to it as 'Berryfields'. This reduces the potential benefits of an all-through school so that, for example, teachers rarely share practice across the phases. Staff meetings are held separately. Older pupils only occasionally work or volunteer with those younger than themselves.
- The presence of a single finance director, who oversees the whole school budget, is a potential model for top to bottom management of the organisation. The physical barrier between the secondary and primary phases symbolises the unhelpful separation in many other aspects of the school's work.
- There is no single policy for assessment across the school. As a result, the checking of pupils' progress is unnecessarily complicated.
- It was not possible to evaluate fully the impact of additional funding such as the pupil premium and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding as their use has not been tracked purposefully or published over time. Similarly, the primary school's use of the sport premium funding was only reported up to the year 2014–15.
- Previous assessments of the school's performance by sponsors and governors were unrealistic and overgenerous. There remains a lack of accuracy in self-evaluation in the primary phase, poor action planning around the most important priorities and some complacency in addressing weakening standards over time. The need for robust checking of performance has not kept pace with the growth in pupil numbers and the overall expansion of the primary phase of the school.
- The school's curriculum requires improvement. At the moment, students following academic 16 to 19 study programmes do not make good progress in the narrow range of subjects offered. Outcomes for learners on the vocational programmes are much better.
- The new leadership team rightly plans to develop the sixth form so that it offers a focused and narrow group of qualifications. This will be based on effectively taught subjects such as information and communication technology (ICT), music technology, business studies and media, film and television studies. The school has a growing track record of enabling a small number of leavers to take up careers in, for example, gaming technologies.

- Pupils in Years 7 to 11 follow the national curriculum. This enables a few to seek places in local grammar schools for post-16 education. Some go on to local general further education colleges and some seek training placements leading to apprenticeships. Most are prepared effectively for life in modern, diverse Britain.
- Leaders in the primary phase ensure that pupils' creativity is fostered. They also ensure that pupils develop an appropriate understanding of British values through, for example, wall displays relating to Remembrance Sunday.
- Leaders encourage a culture of mutual respect and tolerance through a programme of assemblies. Leaders also oversee the atrium and playground areas so that pupils are able to mix socially and, if they wish, engage in recreational games and activities. Leaders are highly visible at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Leadership has improved dramatically since the new executive principal joined the school in April 2016. He has been ably supported by the vice-principal, who has been persuaded to stay on. The vice-principal was previously frustrated in his ambition to make necessary changes. Both senior leaders have a clear vision for how the school needs to improve.
- The executive principal is driven by the highest of aspirations for the community. The sponsors have been fortunate to appoint someone with the executive principal's track record of excellence and successful school improvement. His clear moral purpose is evident in the few well-chosen words he uses to describe what he is seeing.
- The executive principal has conducted a thorough, accurate and rigorous evaluation of the school. As a result, he has a much better and more realistic understanding of the performance of the school than others responsible for its strategic leadership.
- Parents, pupils and most staff applaud the strenuous efforts the executive principal has already made to improve the school. There is strong evidence of increasing rates of attendance among staff and pupils. Pupils now hurry to get to school and, for the most part, arrive on time to lessons.
- Most notably, behaviour is significantly better. Persistent trouble-makers have been dealt with firmly so that far fewer lessons are disrupted. Teachers are now better able to teach.
- Senior leaders who have joined the leadership team recently are effective classroom practitioners. This means teachers have good models they can follow. This is supported by increasingly rigorous performance management. Teachers in need of training are provided with it immediately. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving quickly.

Governance of the school

- Governance is weak. Governors did not intervene quickly enough when consistently poor performance was clearly visible in published information.
- Governors also treat the school as two schools, asking senior leaders to report separately in formal meetings. This is wasteful of time and effort and leads to a lack of consistency in the monitoring of quality across all the provision.
- Governors have not ensured that safeguarding policies, procedures and practices have been reviewed regularly or rigorously enough. They have an out-of-date understanding of best practice. This has not been helped by the adoption of out-of-date county council 'model' policies.

- Governors represent the sponsor. This means that the quality of sponsorship is also weak. The sponsor has not ensured that the local governing body has held leaders to account robustly for poor performance.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding was judged by inspectors to be effective inside the school. There remain weaknesses in the management of information relating to vulnerable pupils and the extent to which known issues are followed up.
- The checks leaders make on adults wishing to work or volunteer at the school are secure. A recent external review of safeguarding found weaknesses in other aspects of the management of safeguarding. Leaders responsible for safeguarding at the time did not act fast enough or with sufficient urgency to address these shortcomings.
- Inspectors tested whether limitations in the school's policies and procedures meant that any pupils were at risk. Inspection evidence confirms that the executive principal is determined that every pupil will be safe and thrive in the school. He has already acted decisively to secure the safeguarding arrangements. Consequently, inspectors unanimously agreed, before leaving, that the school is safe in his hands.
- Pupils receive training on how to keep themselves safe online. They say that since the executive principal arrived they feel safe. Parents agree that recent improvements to the culture of the school mean that they are confident their children are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teaching over time has failed to provide the vast majority of pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding to take the next steps in their education or career.
- Weak teaching has contributed to poor outcomes for pupils for too long, especially in the secondary phase.
- In many classes, teachers deliver the same material to all the pupils. Some find the work too easy and repetitive. This was noted in several mathematics lessons. Some pupils find the work too hard, become frustrated and lose interest. Often, this leads to poor behaviour.
- Very few of the most able pupils ever receive work that is suitably challenging. As a result, they do not excel in their learning.
- A significant proportion of parents expressed concern that homework does little to support pupils' development.
- Not enough teachers routinely challenge poor work, low standards of presentation or the volume of work pupils get through in lessons. In the sample of work seen there was wide variation in the quality of work pupils had produced. Generally boys' work is more scruffy, less well presented and incomplete compared with girls' work.
- In the primary phase, variation in the standards of phonics teaching means that there is uneven progress in reading across year groups and in cohorts.
- The school is committed, rightly, to supporting the development of pupils' reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills. However, the variability in the quality of teaching means that pupils' success depends heavily on chance and by whom they are taught. Results in mathematics and English in key stage 4, in 2015 and 2016, are evidence of inadequate teaching over time.

- Some of the teaching assistants provide valuable support to pupils who speak English as an additional language and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many of the disadvantaged pupils fail to benefit from this type of extra support because teachers' use of information about their existing knowledge, skills and understanding is poor.
- There are some effective practitioners in all phases of the school. There is some strong practice in the secondary phase of the school in science, information and computer technology and business studies. As a result of recent appointments to the leadership team, there is growing strength in English. As yet, this practice has not been shared with teachers in the primary phase. Similarly, there are pockets of effective teaching in the primary phase, but the opportunity for secondary specialists to benefit from this expertise has not been exploited systematically.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Too few pupils, particularly in the secondary phase, exhibit real interest in learning. Many do what they are told and comply with teachers' requests. Over time older pupils have developed poor learning habits and do not have the self-discipline to maintain good conduct when teaching is weaker.
- Senior leaders are highly visible around the school at break and lunchtimes, which ensures that pupils' conduct remains good at all times. As a result pupils now report themselves to be safe.
- Increasingly, pupils take pride in their appearance now that they have been given strict rules about how they should present themselves and what they should wear. Standards of uniform are similar now to other schools nationally.
- Parents support leaders in recently imposed rules about correct footwear and attendance at detentions when pupils have been avoidably late.
- The new leadership team has raised expectations about behaviour. As a result, the school is an increasingly calm and ordered environment where pupils are more cooperative with staff and each other. They treat each other with respect and are polite and courteous to visitors.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Too many pupils have weak attendance, and the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils is a barrier to their learning. The new executive principal has begun to tackle this serious weakness so that attendance is improving quickly. Some assistance for this is provided by a home-school liaison officer in the primary phase.
- Until April 2016, leaders did not set high enough expectations about pupils' punctuality to school or class. They do now. They also patrol the corridors urging pupils to move to lessons quickly.
- More teachers are actively supporting positive behaviour management activities. This is necessary. As a result, there are fewer instances of lessons being disrupted. The well-managed use of an internal exclusion room and 'room swap' practices contribute to

further improvements to behaviour. However, even in the primary phase some teachers do not manage behaviour well, either ignoring low-level disruption or shouting at pupils with little effect.

- The new executive principal has taken a firm line on unacceptable behaviour so that a few pupils have been removed to educational provision elsewhere. Many pupils told the team that they appreciate this as it has meant they are more able to learn uninterrupted. Pupils following programmes of study in alternative placements are supervised appropriately and supported to behave well with the intention of re-integrating them into their mainstream lessons.
- All stakeholders who commented say that there has been a marked shift in behaviour since 2016. The new executive principal is to be commended for his uncompromising stance on this aspect of school life.
- Leaders work closely with staff in alternative provision placements so that pupils' time spent there is purposeful. Leaders also check that their behaviour is consistent with the alternative placements' policies. They also check that pupils remain safe in such provision.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Too many pupils do not achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- The school does not enable the majority of pupils to attain results comparable to similar pupils in similar schools nationally.
- Pupils do not make good enough progress from key stage 2 to key stage 4. Students following academic 16 to 19 study programmes do not, as a rule, add sufficient value to their education.
- In key stage 1, pupils attain well in the phonics check and all make the required standard by the end of Year 2. Many make good progress in writing and mathematics but do less well in reading.
- Disadvantaged pupils, across the school, generally do less well than other pupils nationally. The school's use of pupil premium funding is not checked well enough to make sure money is directed effectively to have the biggest impact in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The differences in their performance compared with other pupils are diminishing over time in the primary phase, but are still too wide.
- The attainment and progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also weak compared with pupils with similar starting points elsewhere. Some are supported effectively by teaching assistants so that they keep up with their classmates, but starting points overall are low and thus the standards attained eventually are weaker than they should be.
- The most able pupils are poorly served in the school. Very few make the progress that their ability suggests they should. Very few of these pupils attain the highest grades at GCSE or A level.
- Pakistani pupils, the largest single minority ethnic group, in key stage 4 attain standards that are higher than their classmates generally but their achievement is not as good as Pakistani pupils elsewhere.
- The progress of pupils who speak English as an additional language is better than that of all other groups in the school, especially in mathematics. This relatively large group

of pupils has performance levels that are still lower than those of similar pupils in other schools nationally. This is a simple illustration that overall standards are much lower in the school than in other schools nationally.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The quality of the early years provision has not kept pace with the growing numbers of children joining in the Nursery and the surge in Reception.
- The attractively designed, purpose-built setting masks the paucity of the learning environment. For example, leaders show that children enter below standards typical for their age. Many are described as having speech and language difficulties. The learning environment does not, however, provide a wide range of stimuli to support early reading or number recognition. Conversely, some key word displays feature terms like 'collaboration, concentration and listening'. Such words are not appropriate for children arriving with below-average levels of vocabulary and at a pre-reading stage or early stage of reading.
- The outside space is designed to support a 'forest school' approach, but there are limited opportunities for children to explore the natural world. Equally, there are few pieces of equipment where pupils can develop motor skills.
- Teaching is frequently delivered to large groups of children by one adult. Less time is spent with children engaged in individual learning-through-play tasks or being supported by adults as they work through planned activities. In such circumstances, some children wander off task, especially boys.
- The early years team has established secure routines to manage transitions and behaviour in general. Adults often, however, spend more time managing children's behaviour than managing their learning.
- Children attend the setting from a diverse community. A 'We live in Britain' display celebrates this diversity and encourages children to develop appropriate attitudes to each other.
- Children enter the early years at levels generally a little below those found typically for two-, three- or four-year-olds. They make broadly average progress across each year group. This means that outcomes require improvement as children do not make the rapid progress that would help them catch up with other children nationally.
- It was not possible to evaluate how well leaders are currently using pupil premium funding as information was only available up to the academic year 2014–15.
- As with the rest of the school, children are safe in the early years.

16 to 19 study programmes

Require improvement

- The performance of the sixth form is not consistently good enough. Students achieve well on vocational programmes such as business studies, ICT, media, film and television studies. This explains why the judgement about the 16 to 19 study programmes is a grade higher than the overall effectiveness grade for the school.
- The very small numbers of students following academic 16 to 19 study programmes do much less well compared with other pupils nationally.

- School leaders recognise that this is unsustainable and are re-shaping the sixth form curriculum accordingly.
- Leadership of the sixth form is currently undertaken by the achievement director for Year 10. This provides a growing sense of integration with the rest of the school.
- Students benefit from a large recreational space, and close access to the school's library and laptops for their work.
- Much of the teaching in the sixth form leads to the stronger outcomes seen in vocational subjects but has been insufficiently effective to produce successful results in academic programmes. Teachers leading vocational subjects have become adept at supporting students in the independent study necessary to complete, for example, BTEC qualifications.
- Students do not have access to regular, planned and successful work experience placements. A few pupils support younger children in the early years and primary phases of the school. Some intend, as a result, to pursue careers in teaching eventually.
- Students do, however, benefit from independent careers advice and guidance which helps them make appropriate judgements about the next stage in their life, career or education. School leaders commission this service on behalf of the students.
- Leaders ensure that students who did not achieve an A* to C GCSE grade in either English, mathematics or both, at the end of key stage 4 are given focused tuition to help them attain this standard. Not enough make good use of this provision and improve their grades, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- Students generally go on to appropriate higher education, further education or apprenticeships. A small number each year leave the school and are not in education, employment or training at the relevant census point. Most students, however, complete their studies, attaining the relevant qualifications.
- As with the rest of the school, the students are safe in the sixth form. Students receive some age-appropriate training which helps them develop correct attitudes to safeguarding. The new leadership team rightly intends to update staff on the 'Prevent' duty in the next month to strengthen its existing work to tackle extremism and counter radicalisation.
- Clear messages, often stemming from the Church of England foundation and sponsorship of the school, are given to students about respect for self and others. Leaders also encourage students to celebrate the community's diversity through assemblies shared with Year 10.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 135879 |
| Local authority | Buckinghamshire |
| Inspection number | 10019903 |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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| Type of school | All-through |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 2 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1,332 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 97 |
| Appropriate authority | The academy trust |
| Chair | Simon Weaver |
| Executive principal | Roger Burman |
| Telephone number | 01296 428 551 |
| Website | http://www.theacademy.me |
| Email address | principal@theacademy.me |
| Date of previous inspection | 16–17 September 2014 |

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication on its website of information about its curriculum, how it makes use of additional funding, the structure of the sponsor and governing body or the roles that governors have in other schools.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about its curriculum, how it intends to make use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium, primary sports funding and Year 7 literacy and numeracy funding, how pupils are safeguarded and protected effectively, the pecuniary and business interests of current governors, nor how governance is operated against the sponsor's scheme of delegation.

- Aylesbury Vale is a large multi-phase school with growing numbers in the Nursery, primary and secondary phases.
- There are slightly more boys than girls at the school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The proportion of pupils from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds is nearly double the national average. A quarter of the population are of Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is double the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan or statement of their special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- The school serves a very mobile population with pupils enrolling or leaving regularly throughout the year.
- The community served by Aylesbury Vale Academy has average levels of deprivation.
- The school works with three pupil referral units: Pathway, Blueprint and Aspire, to ensure that the needs of a small minority of pupils are better met. Some pupils benefit from alternative provision at Aylesbury College.
- The school has failed consistently to meet the government's floor standards for the secondary phase of education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 59 parts of lessons. Six of these were observed jointly with school leaders. The lead inspector conducted three tours of the school while learning was underway, one with the head of the primary phase.
- Inspectors met formally with four groups of pupils. Inspectors also listened to a group of Year 4 pupils reading and a group of Year 8 readers. Inspectors spoke informally to many pupils in lessons and during breaks and lunchtime. Inspectors took into account eight responses to Ofsted’s confidential online survey.
- Inspectors met with a wide range of teachers and took into account 68 responses to Ofsted’s confidential staff survey.
- Inspectors spoke with 13 parents from the primary phase of the school. The lead inspector conducted a formal interview with four parents from the secondary phase of the school. Inspectors also took into account 80 responses to Parent View, Ofsted’s confidential online survey.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body and representatives of the sponsor.
- Inspectors examined examples of the school’s documentation, including information about pupils’ performance, separate self-evaluation documents for the primary and secondary phases and separate action plans for both parts of the school.
- On the first day of the inspection, it was not possible to gather all the evidence required. It was also found that the school was larger than the information provided to the Department for Education indicated. An additional inspector joined the team for the second day of the inspection.

Inspection team

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Simon Hughes, lead inspector | Her Majesty’s Inspector |
| Dom Cook | Her Majesty’s Inspector |
| Ann Fearon | Ofsted Inspector |
| Chris Corr | Ofsted Inspector |
| Gillian Peck | Ofsted Inspector |
| Jane Cartwright | Ofsted Inspector |

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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