

Inspection of a good school: The Aylesbury Vale Academy

Paradise Orchard, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP18 0WS

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 May 2024

Outcome

The Aylesbury Vale Academy continues to be a good school.

The Principal of this school is Gavin Gibson. This school is part of Aylesbury Vale Academy Trust. The trust is overseen by a board of governors, chaired by Robin Scott.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils of all ages enjoy their time at school here. They are polite and courteous, in line with the school's values. In early years, children learn to take turns and share. At every stage, pupils know that staff will listen and help them. Pupils' successes and achievements are celebrated. This helps to foster a strong sense of community throughout the school.

The school is ambitious for every pupil to learn and achieve. The curriculum gives pupils cultural understanding and the skills of learning, as well as academic knowledge. As a result, pupils are prepared well for the next stage in their educational journey. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from effective support to help them learn.

The school provides engaging and exciting experiences. For example, visiting a local farm helps primary pupils to understand about different parts of plants. Guest speakers help pupils to develop their curiosity and to explore potential careers. By making many of these opportunities available to pupils of all ages, the school seeks to raise their aspirations. Students in the sixth form develop their leadership skills through supporting younger pupils, and acting as representatives of pupils across the school.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that builds pupils' knowledge from early years through to sixth form. For example, teachers use the same calculation methods at every stage in mathematics. This helps pupils to apply their mathematical learning with increasing skill and confidence as they move through the school. Similarly, teachers build pupils' vocabulary in a clear sequence. When introducing new terminology, teachers link it

with what pupils already know. This enables pupils to speak and write about scientific or musical ideas with accuracy. In the secondary phase, leaders have considered how best to respond to previous low rates of entry to the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) suite of GCSE subjects. By placing particular emphasis on the importance of modern foreign languages, the EBacc entry level is now rising year on-year.

Assessment information is used effectively by teachers and leaders. They identify topics that pupils need to revisit, and adapt lesson activities to address these. This process of review also helps the school to identify and meet the needs of pupils with SEND effectively. In early years, staff pay close attention to how children interact with them and one another. As a result, activities for play and learning help children to develop language and number confidence.

Teachers give clear explanations and examples for pupils to follow. For example, in mathematics they take complex ideas like calculating vectors, and break these down into simple steps. As a result, pupils develop detailed knowledge of mathematical concepts. Teachers use the school's 'taxonomy of learning' to provide challenging tasks for all pupils. In some subjects, there are times when some teachers do not check how much pupils understand from the task they are working on. When this happens, some pupils do not learn as effectively, leading to gaps in their learning.

Reading is recognised by the school as being a key priority. For pupils at the early stage of learning to read, teaching of phonics is precise and effective. Weaker readers at every stage benefit from targeted input that helps them to become more fluent. At times, the books used by weaker readers do not align with what they can read on their own. This can impede their development of confidence and fluency. In the secondary phase, the tutor-led reading programme helps to broaden the range of books that pupils read. This approach also supports pupils to develop the quality of their written work.

Pupils achieve well and perform well in national tests and examinations. In the primary phase, pupils develop a strong foundation for later learning. GCSE outcomes represent strong performance relative to pupils' starting points. Although student numbers in sixth form are small, they achieve highly on their courses, and leaders continue to expand the breadth of subjects on offer.

The school's strategic approach to attendance is helping to bring about sustained improvement. Staff work closely with families to address the causes of persistent absence. Pupils' conduct supports the learning ethos of the school. Primary pupils are proud to be kind and helpful to each other. Staff set clear boundaries for how pupils are expected to behave. When pupils do not adhere to this, such as using derogatory language, staff take effective actions to address this.

Pupils get to explore ethical questions and current affairs in ways suited to their age. They become determined advocates for equality and inclusivity. Those who are part of the eco council or student parliament are proud to serve their school. Leaders make sure that extracurricular opportunities are fully accessible to disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND. The school's careers education helps pupils to feel well informed about their next steps. This provision contributes strongly to the culture of ambition within the school.

Staff feel positive about the school's approach to workload. The cycle of assessment meetings helps to sharpen teachers' focus on improving pupils' learning. Leaders and governors prioritise making the school's improvement sustainable. As a result, everyone within the school is committed to achieving success for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, teachers' checks on what pupils know and can do are not as systematic as they are in the strongest areas. When this happens, some pupils do not learn the intended curriculum as strongly as they could. Leaders need to embed the rigorous approach to checking pupils' understanding seen in many areas of the school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2019.

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	135879
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10321933
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,814
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Robin Scott
Principal	Gavin Gibson
Website	www.theacademy.me
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 January 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Aylesbury Vale Academy is the only academy in the Aylesbury Vale Academy Trust.
- Aylesbury Vale Academy is a Church of England sponsor-led academy. The most recent section 48 SIAMS inspection took place in July 2018. The next section 48 SIAMS inspection is due to take place before July 2026.
- The school currently uses three registered alternative providers and nine 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

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 school leaders, including the principal and senior leaders across all phases of the school. The inspectors also met representatives from the governing board.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, early reading, science, mathematics and music. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, 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 curriculum and provision for pupils with SEND.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, governors, staff, parents and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts the pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Daniel Botting, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kimberley Kemp

Ofsted Inspector

Shazia Akram

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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