

St Aldhelm's Academy

Herbert Avenue, Poole, Dorset BH12 4HS

Inspection dates 2–3 March 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The Ambitions Academies Trust and in particular the chief executive officer have transformed the quality of education the school provides. The school is unrecognisable from when it was placed into special measures in 2014.
- The Principal and senior leaders have brought about rapid and sustained improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' outcomes and their behaviour.
- Pupils' behaviour is significantly better than at the time of the previous inspection and the school is now a calm and harmonious establishment. Pupils are, rightly, proud to be associated with their school.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers are developing in their confidence and deliver teaching which inspires and motivates pupils to want to learn.
- The progress pupils make has improved significantly. Pupils across most year groups and subjects now achieve well. The school continues to improve.
- While older pupils still have some gaps in their learning due to historic poor teaching, these gaps are being successfully narrowed by pupils' determination to be successful.
- Pupils' personal development, confidence and resilience are developing well. A high level of trust and respect exists between pupils and their teachers.
- The very small number of learners on the 16 to 19 study programmes achieve well.
- The academy advisory committee (AAC) and the trust board know the school very well and provide high-quality governance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Middle leaders do not, as yet, take responsibility for developing the quality of teaching within their departments.
- The most-able pupils are not consistently challenged to think more deeply about their learning, which can limit the progress they make.
- Some teachers do not accurately assess pupils' understanding of key concepts and ideas. As a result, some pupils do not receive the extra support required and others do not move forward in their learning quickly enough.
- Some pupils do not use the feedback teachers provide to improve their learning.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by ensuring that all teachers:
 - challenge most-able pupils to think more deeply about their learning
 - accurately assess pupils' understanding of key concepts and ideas to provide them with further support or to move their learning on
 - make sure that pupils improve their learning as a result of the feedback they receive.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that middle leaders take more responsibility for developing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their departments.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since taking over the sponsorship of the academy, the Ambitions Academies Trust and in particular the chief executive officer have brought about a stunning transformation. Through the trust's proven track record of improving schools experiencing significant challenges and its deployment of high-quality senior leaders, rapid and sustained improvement is evident in all aspects of the school's work. A school that was described as 'dysfunctional and unsafe' during the first monitoring visit of February 2015 is now a place which is rooted in high expectations, where pupils behave well and enjoy coming to the school each day. One pupil summed up the changes at the school by saying, 'we have watched it evolve into such a great school'.
- The Principal and senior leaders provide excellent leadership at the school. They are resolute in their determination to make St Aldhelm's Academy an outstanding educational establishment. Senior leaders communicate the highest of expectations and have raised the aspirations and restored the confidence of staff, pupils and parents. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' outcomes have improved rapidly. Pupils' behaviour, in particular, has undergone a dramatic improvement.
- Leaders provide highly effective support and guidance for teachers to improve the quality of their teaching. Through the sharing of best practice, work with external consultants and effective individualised support, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. The processes to hold staff to account are rigorous and robust. Staff are set challenging targets to improve aspects of their teaching and for the impact their teaching has on pupils' outcomes. Leaders fully support teachers to improve the quality of their teaching but will also take swift and decisive action when improvement is not made.
- Middle leaders monitor very closely the progress pupils make. They ensure that current assessment information is accurate and robust through close scrutiny of pupils' work. Middle leaders do not, however, play any role in developing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within their departments.
- Extra government funding for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who need support to catch up is used well. These pupils are monitored closely and effective extra support is provided when necessary. Pupils' academic, social and emotional needs are also effectively developed and these pupils therefore progress well.
- The curriculum has been adapted to better meet pupils' differing needs. For example, extra literacy and numeracy time is provided to improve the basic skills of pupils with low levels of attainment on entry to Year 7. The choices at Key Stage 4 for pupils are more aspirational than in previous years and, through very high-quality careers guidance, pupils are more ambitious in their choices and future prospects. Some older pupils, however, have experienced a narrower curriculum due to historic poor leadership at the time of their choices. In addition, few had the opportunity to study the subjects which make up the English baccalaureate, such as science, humanities and a language.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is developed well through the curriculum and in particular through philosophy and ethics. Pupils have a good understanding of people from different countries, cultures and beliefs. Within the school, pupils from a variety of backgrounds show respect for each other. Pupils' understanding of British values is effectively developed. For example, the elected school council takes its responsibilities seriously and understands how it can influence further change at the school.
- All pupils appreciate the extra opportunities beyond the classroom to which they can gain access. Through these opportunities, pupils' academic, social and cultural education is effectively developed. Each pupil accesses individualised academic support where necessary and also enrichment opportunities. For example, pupils can learn about France, its culture and food; they sing and act; they develop their social skills through board games and raise their aspirations through regular meetings with learners from Bournemouth University.
- Leaders draw on a range of highly effective support from within the trust and also from external consultants. This support is carefully targeted at key aspects of the school's work. As a result, clear and rapid improvements are evident in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' behaviour and also the quality of teaching in mathematics.

The governance of the school

- The AAC and the trust board govern the school highly effectively. The AAC monitors key aspects of the school's work such as pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment well. The AAC understands accurately the key strengths of the school and the areas still in need of further development. Committee members provide searching challenge to senior leaders to maintain the rapid pace of improvement.
- The AAC has a thorough understanding of how extra government funding is issued and the positive impact this has on the education of eligible pupils and their outcomes. The trust board oversees key aspects of the school's other work such as staffing, finance and premises very well. The trust board uses its considerable educational expertise to ensure that key staff, such as senior leaders, are of a very high quality.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are regularly and effectively trained on aspects of safeguarding so that a clear culture of high-quality safeguarding practice exists across the school. Checks on teachers are thorough and record keeping meticulous to help ensure that the safety of pupils is fundamental in all aspects of the school's work.
- Key staff work very closely with pupils and their families to identify vulnerable pupils and to put in place appropriate support and monitoring. Close liaison and working with external agencies provides extra effective support for pupils and their families where necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved and is now good. Teachers' confidence has risen through the effective support they receive and as pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning have improved.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge in most areas of the curriculum and they use this to plan learning which motivates and inspires pupils. Pupils respond positively and show a genuine interest and curiosity in their learning. They are eager to work closely with their teachers to achieve well. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English and in philosophy and ethics is very high.
- Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' behaviour and the quality of pupils' work. Excellent established routines allow lessons to start promptly with little learning time lost as pupils follow instructions quickly. Relationships between teachers and pupils are a key strength of the school. Pupils have the confidence to ask questions and to offer their thoughts and opinions. One pupil said, 'We trust our teachers now.'
- Disadvantaged pupils are well known to staff and teachers use information on these pupils' current progress and their individual needs to plan for them to achieve well. Teachers ensure that any disadvantaged pupil who may be at risk of underperforming is given extra support as a priority. The focus on this group of pupils is successfully improving their performance.
- Learning support assistants provide helpful support for pupils with special educational needs or disability, which pupils fully appreciate. Teachers pay particular attention to developing pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills in their subject and encourage the use of key subject-specific vocabulary. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils were confident in using words such as hypotenuse, square root and area to explain how and why Pythagoras' theorem works.
- Teachers consistently provide pupils with feedback on their work in line with the school's policy. Pupils indicate that the feedback they receive usually helps them to understand what they have done well and how they can improve their learning further. However, some books indicate that some pupils do not always use the feedback effectively to improve their work.
- Some teachers do not consistently assess pupils' understanding of key concepts and ideas accurately. As a result, work in pupils' books is sometimes unfinished or incorrect and teaching moves on without their full understanding. The progress pupils make as a result is sometimes slower as they have been unable to consolidate previous learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- As teaching has improved, pupils have developed more positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils value the support and guidance their teachers provide for them and pupils' confidence and resilience is improving.
- As a result of effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, pupils are more reflective about the importance of their education and the part they play in being successful learners. Pupils' aspirations have risen and they understand how their behaviour and actions can impact on others both positively and negatively.
- The school cares very well for pupils. A wide range of support and help is available for pupils if needed. Pupils know how to gain access to this support and they have a well-developed understanding of how to keep themselves healthy both physically and mentally.
- School council members take their position of responsibility very seriously. They are proud of their school and approach their role in working alongside staff in a mature manner. Council members are effusive in their praise for the improvements in all aspects of the school's educational provision but are also determined to work alongside leaders to bring about further improvements.
- Pupils feel safe and indicate that bullying is rare. They have a good understanding of different types of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, in particular when using technology. Pupils trust adults in the school and those who spoke to inspectors were clear about the range of adults they could turn to for support if needed.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils speak overwhelmingly positively about the improvements in behaviour since the Ambitions Academies Trust and current senior leaders took over the running of the school. The school is now a place where behaviour is good both in and out of lessons. Pupils wear their uniform well and talk with pride about their school.
- Pupils look after their school well and respect the environment. The canteen is a place where pupils congregate to eat together and to socialise in a calm and sensible manner. Pupils understand that dropping litter is irresponsible.
- In lessons, pupils work very well together. They encourage each other to do their best and help their peers should they become stuck or need some support. Pupils exhibit high levels of respect towards each other and embrace those from different backgrounds and beliefs. Pupils take great pride in their work and most work is presented to a high standard.
- Leaders set high expectations of pupils' behaviour and teachers follow the agreed behaviour policy consistently. While the proportion of pupils who receive a fixed-term exclusion remains higher than the national average, it has reduced significantly.
- Good attendance is given a high priority and school staff ensure that pupils and parents understand this. High-quality pastoral care supports pupils and their families who may experience difficulties in attending regularly. Attendance has improved significantly and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- The progress pupils make has improved significantly as a result of the good teaching they receive and pupils' positive engagement and determination to do well. While some older pupils have gaps in their learning due to historic poor teaching, they are working effectively alongside their teachers to close these gaps rapidly.

- Historic examination results, including those published in 2015, indicate that far too many pupils have underachieved in the past. Over the last year, since the Ambitions Academies Trust has taken over the running of the school, the progress current pupils make has risen and they now achieve well across most subjects. In particular, the progress pupils make in English, philosophy and ethics and art is impressive.
- Targets set for pupils' achievement are challenging, which has raised aspirations and expectations of both teachers and pupils. The school tracks the pupils' progress very closely and teachers provide extra support for pupils when necessary. Leaders ensure that information on pupils' achievement is accurate through a range of processes, including moderation by middle leaders and close scrutiny of the quality of pupils' work. The work in pupils' books confirms the good progress they now make.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability achieve well. This aspect of the school's work is well organised and effectively led. Identification of pupils' individual needs is accurate and rigorous plans and provision are in place to enable pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils who enter the school with low levels of attainment, particularly in literacy, receive effective extra support. The work in this area enables pupils to become fluent readers, which in turn gives them the skills to be successful across the curriculum. Pupils value this support and they are developing their confidence in, and enjoyment of, reading well.
- Disadvantaged pupils are known well by teachers and they receive effective extra help when required. Gaps between their achievement and that of their peers have been historically small due to most pupils performing less well than they should. The progress disadvantaged pupils now make is similar to their peers and the gap between them and their peers nationally is closing at a rapid pace.
- The most-able pupils now generally progress well. The proportion of pupils in mathematics on track to achieve a grade A has improved. However, the most-able pupils are not consistently provided with work to enable them to think more deeply about their learning. Sometimes they complete routine questions which do not really stretch their thinking.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- In summer 2015, the Ambitions Academies Trust decided to discontinue the sixth-form provision at the school. As a result of this, no Year 12 learners were admitted to the sixth form in September 2015.
- At the time of this inspection, only eight learners were on courses in Year 13. These learners entered the school sixth form with low levels of attainment but have made good progress on level 3 courses. All learners are on track to successfully pass their courses. All who commenced sixth form in Year 12 remain in the sixth form.
- Learners receive effective independent advice and guidance. All learners have obtained places at higher education, on apprenticeships or in employment once they have completed their courses.
- Teaching enables learners to progress well. In particular, teaching to enable learners to attain a grade C at GCSE level in English and/or mathematics has seen learners make significant progress.
- Non-qualification provision, including a wide range of effective enrichment activities and work experience, effectively develops learners' personal development and well-being and prepares them well for life beyond the sixth form.

School details

Unique reference number	136206
Local authority	Poole
Inspection number	10009929

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	353
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	8
Appropriate authority	Academy advisory committee
Chair	Brian Hooper
Principal	Sian Thomas
Telephone number	01202 732500
Website	www.staldhelms-academy.co.uk
Email address	office@staldhelmsacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	2–3 October 2014

Information about this school

- St Aldhelm's Academy is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. It is sponsored by the Ambitions Academies Trust which officially took over the running of the school in June 2015.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding is above average. This is additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is much higher than the national average.
- While the school has a very small sixth form, this provision will close at the end of the 2016 academic year.
- The school did not meet the current government floor standards in 2015, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- No pupils access their education at alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 28 lessons. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also made short visits to lessons and scrutinised the quality of work in pupils' books.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of students, a member of the AAC and a representative of the local authority. A telephone conversation took place with the regional schools commissioner.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including information on pupils' outcomes, the school's development plan, minutes of meetings, records relating to the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment, behaviour and the safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils' conduct at break and lunchtimes.
- Too few responses were received the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be considered.

Inspection team

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