

The Aspire Academy

Bridgwater Road, Worcester, Worcestershire WR4 9FQ

Inspection dates

3–4 May 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has been effective in creating a calm and purposeful school where pupils feel safe and staff are proud to work. Since his appointment, he has used a range of external support to make sure that the school improves rapidly.
- The school is well organised. Commissioning schools have high confidence in its ability to offer effective support to pupils.
- There is a relentless focus on success. As a result, pupils apply themselves well and value the range of accreditation and qualifications available to them.
- Small class sizes mean that relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils develop their communication skills because staff talk to them frequently and model good communication skills.
- Teachers' questioning is effective and lessons are engaging. As a result, most pupils' behaviour is positive and they are genuinely interested in their work.
- The curriculum strongly supports pupils' progress. Alongside key subjects and a varied vocational curriculum, the wider curriculum prepares pupils well for their next steps. However, there are too many pupils who fail to sustain their attendance in their next place of education or training or their employment.
- Leaders have a good understanding of pupils' learning, social and welfare needs. They support pupils effectively in all of these areas.
- Leaders have developed robust systems to assess pupils when they arrive and to track their progress in English, mathematics and science. They effectively manage the complexity of the consistently changing school population.
- Leaders have not yet developed a secure system to track pupils' progress in vocational subjects.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of the progress tracking system as the school grows, by ensuring that:
 - progress tracking in all subjects matches the strong system developed in English, mathematics and science
 - leaders have a more streamlined system of monitoring progress in vocational subjects
 - parents have a clearer view of exactly what curriculum their child is following and their progress in subjects beyond English, mathematics and science.
- Improve the percentage of pupils going on to sustained destinations by:
 - fully implementing the strong plan already in place, utilising the funding that the school has successfully sought for this purpose
 - fully evaluating each element of the plan to see what works best and what is less effective
 - increasing the number of pupils who are willing to take advantage of the support on offer, especially mock interviews and other activities in preparation for future study and employment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The new headteacher and his senior team have rapidly improved the school. The school's caring culture, level of expectation and calmness mean that pupils rapidly develop their self-control, self-esteem and aspirations.
- The headteacher welcomes external scrutiny and builds this into action planning. Inspectors saw evidence of extremely detailed and insightful audits and reviews done by consultants and representatives from commissioning schools, and the positive impact following the school's response to these reviews.
- Leaders place a strong emphasis on staff professional development in response to the particular skills needed in the school. The school trains its own staff, and invests heavily in leadership training and opportunities at all levels, linked to the appraisal process. Staff value this training because it allows them to be involved in a variety of areas of school life and take on leadership roles.
- The curriculum is innovative and growing, and pupils find it exciting. There is a wide variety of qualifications and accreditations on offer and leaders design bespoke programmes for each pupil. All pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics and science alongside vocational subjects such as childcare, motor vehicle maintenance, small animal care, carpentry and music. Leaders have also designed an additional curriculum which operates during school holidays. This effectively maintains pupils' engagement with school. These lessons build pupils' skills, social skills, fitness and self-esteem while making sure that they are ready for the start of a new term.
- Pupils who are eligible for extra support from pupil premium funding have their needs met well. This is because leaders spend much time liaising with the home school and families to establish and overcome for the pupils their barriers to success. Targeted support has included support with bikes for transport to school, school equipment, books and revision materials.
- Leaders ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have their needs met well. Through thorough baseline testing, one-to-one support and detailed personal learning plans, these pupils are well catered for.
- Parents value many aspects of the school's work including the communication with them and encouragement of pupils. For example, one commented: 'I have so much feedback from the school which makes me and my child really happy'. Another said: 'even when my child gives up, the staff don't... they are a good bunch of staff who genuinely care'.
- All staff actively and conspicuously model positive behaviour. They are persistent in encouraging pupils to do the same. This includes robustly tackling the use of derogatory language and actively promoting equality. As a result, pupils are being well prepared for life in modern Britain and their lives after school.
- Leaders have put in place many effective systems in all areas of the school's operations. For example, the tracking system for core subjects ensures that teachers know pupils starting points at key stage 2, starting points on entry to the school and the distance to be travelled so that pupils make the progress that they are capable of. However, this

tracking system is not as well developed outside of the core subjects. This means that leaders are not in a secure position to monitor the pupils' progress in vocational subjects. The school is not in a position to provide parents with a strong overview of their child's progress towards qualifications and other accreditations in these subjects.

- As the school grows in size, leaders are developing their ability to track pupils as groups. This is not yet as well developed as it needs to be. Leaders already know that they need to streamline their tracking of progress in vocational subjects as pupil numbers have increased considerably since the school opened.

Governance of the school

- Governors are committed to the school and are involved in many aspects of the school's life. Many governors regularly meet pupils and so have first-hand knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- Governors have a range of skills that enable them to support and challenge the school well. They have a good strategic understanding of the school's development and the context of the pupils who attend. They know which things they need to focus their challenge on to make sure that pupils' progress improves.
- Governors' knowledge of, and oversight of, safeguarding is very strong. The safeguarding governor visits the school regularly, scrutinises safeguarding processes and documentation, and reports back to the governing body. Additionally, a number of governors have highly developed knowledge and training in safeguarding. This means that they offer well-informed challenge and support.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that training for staff is up to date. Leaders have a strong knowledge of the particular risks that pupils at the school face. As a result, they have made sure that staff have accredited training in a variety of important areas such as bullying and the specific risks faced by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Inspectors noted that safeguarding procedures were meticulously followed and documented. Staff know how to raise a concern, concerns are logged in detail, and actions recorded. Leaders ensure that all concerns are dealt with promptly.
- Leaders ensure that the vetting of staff and the associated documentation is complete. Records are detailed and of high quality. The checks on the safeguarding procedures for alternative provision are similarly of high quality.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The relationships between teachers and pupils are good. This means that most pupils learn well, listen to their teachers and make good progress. Pupils feel confident to ask their teachers questions when they don't understand. Teachers' comprehensive awareness of pupils' social and emotional needs mean that they effectively enable pupils to overcome these barriers and be successful in lessons.

- Inspectors saw many examples of lessons which engaged, challenged and motivated pupils to do well. Teachers choose interesting tasks which meet pupils' needs well, allow them to be successful and equip them with the personal skills to make progress. Pupils respond positively to these tasks. For example, in one music lesson pupils were composing a song collaboratively. They showed musicianship skills in listening carefully, contributing and rehearsing sensibly.
- Teachers plan their lessons carefully to make sure that pupils' skills and knowledge grow steadily. Pupils talk animatedly about how they are developing and they have pride in their work.
- Teachers use dialogue, including questioning, consistently and effectively. This engages pupils, encourages them to think, and means that conversations with staff in lessons are common. For example, in one childcare lesson a teacher asked pupils a series of factual questions about bathing a baby and then required them to relate their answers to their knowledge of healthcare for babies.
- Many pupils arrive at the school with very low reading ages. Knowing that this will hold back their progress, leaders have a range of strategies to rapidly improve their reading and comprehension skills. For example, where appropriate, teachers use phonics to enhance basic reading skills. Pupils have access to high-quality, accessible, age-appropriate texts to read. They have guided reading sessions, regular reading tests and reading time each day. This focus on literacy is also seen in lessons, with teachers ensuring that pupils can access lesson materials, emphasising key words and developing writing skills.
- Teachers ensure that pupils, including the most able, are challenged. For example, in one lesson pupils in Year 9 were studying Browning's 'My Last Duchess'. The class grappled successfully with difficult language features and posed a host of questions to the teacher in relation to the text. In another lesson, pupils deconstructed the brake assembly of a car. This challenging task required skill and patience. Pupils responded well and successfully completed this task.
- The school uses alternative provision to enhance the curriculum for some pupils. During inspectors' visits to these alternative providers, lessons were mostly purposeful and engaging, and pupils were responding well. The school monitors its alternative provision well and records show that lessons at all of the alternative provision are typically of a high quality.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident that they have someone to speak to if they have a problem. Each pupil has a key worker, a named person who helps manage their transition into the school and is a point of contact for any issues. Many pupils speak highly of the support of their key worker and all say that senior staff are very approachable. This helps pupils feel confident, especially when they arrive at the school.
- The highly skilled staff understand the needs of pupils well. Through the consistent

application of the staff motto: 'relentless reasonableness', leaders have created a positive and calm environment. Pupils' negative choices are consistently challenged and discussed. Pupils' attitudes to their learning, themselves and others improve over time.

- Staff provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their social and communication skills. For example, some pupils choose to arrive at school an hour early so that they can talk to staff over breakfast. During social times, staff make time to talk to pupils about their day and often sit and eat with them. As a result of this, they are ready to learn and effectively develop their social skills and become better prepared for life after school.
- Pupils have a well-developed knowledge of bullying, know how to report it and are confident that when reported it is dealt with effectively by staff. Pupils feel safe in school. Inspectors spoke to pupils who had just arrived, and while they acknowledged that they were nervous about coming to the school, they had quickly settled into school life and felt more confident.
- Leaders have developed strong partnership links with local businesses. Local businesses support the school well. For example, one provides the wood that pupils use to enhance the environment by making tables and seats for the allotment area. Many local businesses offer work experience placements. These links enable pupils to have contact with people from a variety of backgrounds and this enhances pupils' personal development.
- Leaders closely monitor the progress, behaviour and welfare of pupils in alternative provision. Pupils' personal development is well developed on these placements because the work they do is practical, exciting and related to their interests.
- Pupils prepare for their next steps with a mock interview programme which is valued by many and gives them confidence. However, some pupils decide not to have one of these interviews and so are less well prepared for their destinations. Leaders have been successful in gaining extra funding from an external agency to extend their provision for Year 11 pupils through the summer break. This will enable the school to better support pupils in the months preceding their arrival at their next destinations.
- There is a strong work experience programme for key stage 4 pupils on which they learn valuable work skills. Some pupils would like their work experience to have a stronger link with their personal career interests.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Outside of lesson times, the pupils are generally calm and sociable. For example, pupils have the opportunity to play table tennis, have some quiet time in the library or attend a lunchtime club. Staff are on hand to model positive behaviour and this helps pupils develop good social relationships.
- Sometimes pupils struggle to cope with the demands of school life. Staff respond quickly and calmly to make sure that disruptions do not escalate and that pupils are quickly reintegrated back into their lessons.
- To improve behaviour, on his arrival the headteacher established a new monitoring system. This initially resulted in an increase in recorded behaviour incidents. Staff now

have a clear understanding of the behaviour trends and pupils' behaviour over time. As a result of this, the number of incidents of poor behaviour has decreased quickly.

- The school deals well with antisocial behaviour such as smoking and swearing. Leaders apply sanctions when necessary and support pupils through clear policies, consistent reminders, liaison with parents, and smoking cessation support.
- While pupils' attendance is below the national average, it is improving because leaders put intelligent measures in place to support regular attendance. For example, absences are followed up with phone calls each day, home visits encourage better attendance and leaders swiftly identify the specific barriers to pupils' attendance. Pupils' attendance at The Aspire Academy improves considerably compared to their attendance at their previous school placements.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- There is no published data for this school because until recently, all pupils have remained on the roll of their home school. This is still the case for most pupils.
- From their starting points when they arrive at the school, pupils make good progress. Leaders make sure that they have accurate baselines and half-termly assessment points so that they can plan interventions when pupils fall behind in English, mathematics and science.
- Inspectors evaluated samples of work in English, mathematics and vocational subjects. This work showed that pupils, including the most able and most-able disadvantaged pupils, make good progress from their starting points. For example, in comprehension books inspectors observed pupils progressing from circling answers, to single word answers, to full sentence answers over a period of months. Inspectors also looked at a sample of work done by most-able pupils which similarly showed good progress over time.
- There is an improving trend of pupils gaining GCSEs in English and mathematics, making good progress from their starting points in these subjects. There is also a rapid increase in the number of accreditations that pupils gain by the end of their time at the school. These accreditations build up a portfolio of proven skills and knowledge that pupils can be proud of and share with prospective further education providers and employers.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. They are well supported and teaching meets their individual needs. Their attendance is above the national average, which supports this positive progress well.
- The work leaders carry out to prepare pupils for the next steps in their education is effective for many of them. Teachers support pupils' applications to further education and training. They act as advocates in the application process so that future providers have a full understanding of pupils' needs, aspirations, potential and positive attributes. Depending on their prior attainment, pupils go on to a range of level 1, 2 and 3 courses.
- In 2016, almost all pupils at the end of Year 11 secured places in education, employment and training. There is no published data about sustained destinations for

these pupils. However, the school tracked these pupils carefully so that leaders could evaluate their information, advice and guidance process. Leaders found that the percentage of pupils who stayed in their education, employment and training was below the national average.

- Leaders have designed a well-considered action plan to further improve the support for Year 11 pupils in their next steps. This includes support throughout the summer break. The school has been successful in gaining extra funding to deliver this, but it is too early to evaluate the impact.

School details

Unique reference number	141034
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	10032568

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

Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	21
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mr P Collins
Headteacher	Mr S Stevenson
Telephone number	01905 455422
Website	www.theaspireacademy.org.uk
Email address	admin@theaspireacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Aspire Academy is a free school for alternative provision which opened in 2014. Pupils join the school at any time during their secondary education. The school offers provision for pupils who have been, or who are, at risk of permanent exclusion.
- Pupils attend the school on a part-time, full-time, temporary or permanent basis. Temporary placements range from a few days to academic years.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average.
- Schools in the local authority, and increasingly from a wider area, commission placements at the school.
- Classes are kept to a maximum of eight pupils and many are much smaller. Pupils access a curriculum of qualifications and accreditation according to their starting points and needs.

- The school currently uses four alternative providers to extend its curriculum offer. The providers take various numbers of pupils at different times. They are the Heart of Worcester College, Gloverspiece Minifarm, Wildgoose Rural Training and Worcester YMCA.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior staff and governors. They also met with curriculum leaders, key stage leaders and trainee teachers. To gain an insight into the views of pupils, inspectors met groups both formally and informally during the inspection.
- Inspectors visited lessons in a range of subjects and year groups, observed reading and mentoring sessions and an assembly. The quality of alternative provision was evaluated through inspector visits to two other providers.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised including information relating to governance, safeguarding, policies, risk assessments, service level agreements with alternative provision and staff training. Inspectors also took account of the school's tracking information and pupils' support plans.
- The views of parents were evaluated through Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Inspectors also took into account 29 responses to a staff survey, and the school's internal pupil and parent surveys.
- Inspectors evaluated pupils' work over time through work samples, speaking to pupils about their work in lessons and scrutiny of work from previous years.

Inspection team

Dan Owen, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Rowena Green

Ofsted Inspector

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