

Aspire Academy

Frome Road, Odd Down, Bath BA2 5RF

Inspection dates

22–23 March 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 principal's strong and inspirational leadership has ensured that Aspire Academy provides a good education for its students. He is supported well by an effective team who are passionate about ensuring that students achieve well.
- Senior leaders regularly check that the quality of teaching is of a high standard. They ensure that the good range of training opportunities extend teachers' skills. As a result, teaching and learning are good.
- Teachers use their good knowledge and understanding of students to plan work that is interesting and captures their attention. This is a key factor in ensuring that students make good progress in their learning.
- Very good attention to students' literacy skills, through regular and well-focused lessons, is enabling them to develop their skills in reading. Students are confident to write in detail because teachers, in all subjects, have high expectations that they will do so.
- Parents are extremely positive about how they, and their children, have been helped by the school. This close partnership has supported students to attend school more regularly. Many students have improved their attendance from their previous settings.
- Behaviour in and around the school is good and students show awareness of the impact of their behaviours on others. They have a good understanding of right and wrong and respond well to the school's rewards systems.
- The school ensures that students are kept safe, and the strong relationships with families and outside agencies support students beyond the school gates.
- Students' targets for learning in English and mathematics are challenging and well understood by students. However, targets for learning in other subjects are not shared as well with students and this prevents them from understanding how well they are doing.
- In primary and for key stage 3, students' progress is tracked well in English and mathematics. This process is not yet fully embedded for other subjects. This hampers staff from tracking students' progress as effectively as they could.
- The trust monitors the work of the school closely. The school's governing body is in the process of developing its role further to better hold leaders to account in ensuring that all students make the best possible progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that students understand how well they are doing in all subjects.
- Ensure that the new assessment processes are fully established in all subjects so that students' progress can be tracked more effectively.
- Further develop the role of governors in challenging the school leadership to ensure that all students achieve well.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Much has been achieved since the school opened in April 2014. The principal's vision, that Aspire Academy becomes a centre of excellence for personalised learning programmes, underpins the work of the school. He has established an effective leadership structure that has driven improvements and set high standards for students and staff. Strong teamwork ensures that staff work well together to bring about the best for the students.
- The day-to-day running of the school is managed well, and staff and students understand the routines and leaders' high expectations. The heads of primary and secondary oversee their departments effectively and ensure that the quality of teaching across both phases is at least good.
- The information gathered from checks on the quality of teaching is used to identify training needs on both an individual and a whole-school basis. The very good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement ensures that quick action is taken to address any concerns.
- Senior leaders hold teachers to account for students' progress very well. Analysis of information about progress ensures that interventions are put in place to support any student who is not making sufficient progress. The new assessment processes have been carefully trialled to make sure that they meet the school's needs. They are well established for English and mathematics and the school is in the process of ensuring that assessment criteria are secure for all other subjects.
- The school has clear, and effective, plans for the spending of additional government funding, including pupil premium, funding for pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities and sports funding for primary-aged children. Pupil premium funding is used well to support activities that enable students to access learning, including speech and language therapy and counselling. Sports funding has enhanced students' fitness by providing additional activities in gymnastics, swimming and cycling.
- The commitment of senior leaders and staff to students is very evident in their knowledge and understanding of each individual. Considerable emphasis is placed on supporting students to become effective learners; staff will go the extra mile to help and guide them to manage their behaviours. The recent introduction of an approach that assesses and supports young people's personal and social skills is already beginning to have a positive impact. For example, the school now has clear evidence of improvements in students' behaviour and attitudes.
- The curriculum for all students is well focused on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. In the primary classes and in key stage 3 classes, subjects, other than English and mathematics, are taught through project-based learning. This is planned very carefully to provide students with a range of themed experiences that interest and engage them. Students are well motivated and are developing skills in research and independent learning. The oldest students follow a range of accredited courses, including GCSEs, functional skills and a small number of

vocational courses. The school is in the process of developing its vocational offer further.

- Impartial careers guidance supports older students effectively in decisions about their future and the courses they should follow. The personal, social and health education programme provides guidance to students about the paths they could take; the school is keen to develop this further so that students' early aspirations in Year 7 onwards can be built upon.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the curriculum. The city of Bath is used very well to support students' cultural development. The range of activities, including visits into the local community and work with different groups such as Bath rugby club, does much to support students' skills as well as their understanding of British values. The school is keen to develop its work further, and two middle managers have responsibility for extending provision.

Governance of the school

- The school is closely held to account by the trust through the weekly visits of the chief executive officer. There are high expectations of reporting and ensuring that trustees are kept updated. The scheme of delegation ensures that responsibilities are clearly set out.
- The trust has ensured that systems for the performance management of staff have been effective in raising standards across the school. There are clear processes in place to review staff targets.
- The governing body has gone through a period of change and has a new chair of governors as well as a new governor. Governors know the school well and in many respects hold the school to account well. Their regular visits to the school have resulted in a strong link with students, and governors are keen to ensure that they listen to students' views.
- Governors are rigorous about their checks on safeguarding and monitor students' behaviour closely, including the number of incidents and physical interventions. They are well informed and are pleased with the ongoing reduction of incidents. Governors challenge leaders on occasions and set actions that need to be followed through at the next meeting.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strength and areas for development through the headteacher's detailed reports as well as their visits. While they have an overview of students' progress, they are developing their understanding further, particularly so that they can challenge leaders more effectively in this area.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- At trust and school level, leaders are focused on ensuring that the systems for keeping students safe are robust and fit for purpose. The recruitment arrangements for staff are rigorous and records are up to date. The trust is in the process of reorganising personnel files to ensure that information is easily accessible.

- Staff are fully trained to raise concerns around the recent guidelines, including those relating to female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation and students at risk of radicalisation. There are regular updates of training to ensure that staff are kept well informed.
- The very close links with external agencies, including the police and social services, ensure that the safeguarding lead and senior leaders are fully aware of any concerns or likely concerns. There is a very good understanding of the actions to take if there are any fears that a student is at risk.
- Students' attendance is monitored very closely and the school chases up any absence straightaway. The close links with parents support students, many of whom have improved their attendance from their previous settings.
- Parents consider that their children are safe at school. They are very appreciative of the support they get and are confident to ring staff for advice and help with their children. These positive relationships are reflected in parents' communications with staff to let them know of any concerns or issues that may have upset their child before they arrive in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The knowledge and skills of staff support students in managing their behaviour and settling to work. Well-planned resources and a calm environment are evident in lessons. This greatly helps students to focus on their work. Staff adapt strategies to the needs of individual students and quickly adapt their approaches in order to help a student settle.
- Students respond well to teachers' high expectations and generally work hard and complete tasks. They like the fact that the small classes mean that they often get one-to-one attention. This also enables teachers to work closely with individuals and ensure that they complete tasks. For example, in a one-to-one session about work experience, the teacher was able to encourage the student to use his own ideas in thinking about the skills he would need in the workplace.
- Teachers plan work carefully to ensure that it grabs students' interest and keeps them engaged. In a science lesson, for example, students enjoyed the challenge of working together to identify and match the different facial features of well-known actors. Good attention to planning ensures that the needs of each individual are met in most subjects. This is most evident in the primary department and in mathematics in the secondary department.
- Support staff work seamlessly with students, encouraging and supporting learning. They work with students out of the class when they are struggling but there is a constant dialogue with students to encourage them back into lessons.
- Teachers follow the school's marking policy well. In English and mathematics, students' targets are shared with them and are evident in their books. As a result, students can see if they are making progress. However, in project-based subjects, students do not have the same level of information to check how well they are doing.
- Teachers promote literacy and numeracy well in all subjects. They are very aware of students' resistance to reading but provide different approaches and opportunities to

enable students to access print and improve their skills. As a result, students gain confidence in reading. Staff are equally committed to breaking down barriers to students putting pen to paper. In all subjects, there are high expectations that students will write extended responses to questions. Students respond positively to this because they are well supported to make good progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is good. There is a very high level of care provided to students and their families. Parents commented on the change in their children since starting school and the positive impact this has had at home. One parent commented that this was because the students trust the staff and know that staff care about them.
- Students listen and respond well to staff interventions. They show respect and enjoy opportunities to chat to staff. This is very evident at lunchtimes when students sit together with staff and join in conversations, for example about the forthcoming football match and playing volleyball in physical education.
- In lessons, students generally show positive attitudes to learning, working well both independently and with their peers. They take pride in their work and are keen to show off what they have achieved. In food technology, for example, students explained why they had chosen to cook a chicken curry and what the processes were to make it. Younger students talk about how much they enjoy the forest school and how they have learned to make things from wood.
- Students benefit from access to counselling provided through pupil premium funding. This, together with input from other agencies, helps to support those students who have mental health issues. Students clearly enjoy the opportunities to attend the alternative provision, such as the Laurel Farm, and this greatly enhances their personal and social skills.
- Students say that they are safe in school. Students show a good understanding about the use of the internet and are well supported to understand how to keep themselves safe. They are confident that they can go to any member of staff if they have concerns.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students are proud of the fact that their behaviour has improved since starting at Aspire. One Year 5 student talked about how he now knew when to take himself away from others if he is becoming distressed and can judge when he should return.
- Students are polite and friendly and willing to chat to visitors. They respond well to having lunch in the Bath Studio School and behave very sensibly. They show a good understanding of the school's rules and expectations and clearly value the rewards systems. As a result, the number of incidents and fixed-term exclusions are reducing over time.

- Many students have refused to attend school in their previous settings or have been out of school for long periods of time because of exclusion. Since starting at Aspire, the vast majority improve their attendance and several have attendance that is above the average nationally. A small number, several of whom have mental health issues, are not attending school regularly. The school is working closely with their families and other agencies to bring about improvements in attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Students start school with significant gaps in their learning and many have a negative view of education. As a result, their starting points are very low. Over time, they make good progress and begin to close the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- Younger students in the primary department achieve well in developing their literacy skills, and many have improved their reading and spelling ages since starting school. Staff use a range of different strategies to support reading that meet the specific needs of each student. Students' literacy skills enable them to respond to mathematical problems and they are developing their skills in multiplication and number recognition. They take pride in their written work and make every effort to present their work neatly.
- Older students develop their skills well and take GCSEs and/or functional skills in English and mathematics. There are opportunities to take GCSEs in several other subjects, as well as BTEC in food technology. Students write in detail about a range of topics, including looking at homelessness based on the book 'Stone Cold', and have produced story boards and studied the characters in Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. They have completed projects in humanities and personal and social development.
- The school provides opportunities for students to excel. For example, a most able student was moved to the Bath Studio School and achieved a high number of GCSEs before going on to college. Last year, all students went on to college and all but one are on track to complete their course. All students in the current Year 11 have secured college places or training opportunities for when they leave in July.
- The school is aware that its range of vocational courses is limited. It is working closely with the local college to provide more opportunities for its students to achieve and make progress in such courses.
- Pupil premium funding is used well, particularly in supporting students to access learning and build upon their skills. For example, students benefit from speech and language therapy, which supports their social and communications skills. As a result, the most vulnerable students make similar progress to that of their peers.

School details

Unique reference number	140677
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	10024897

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Diana Allez
Principal	Colin Cattanach
Telephone number	01225 832212
Website	www.aspireacademy.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@aspireacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- 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.
- Aspire Academy opened in April 2014 and is part of the Wellsway Multi Academy Trust.
- It shares its site with The Bath Studio School which is also part of Wellsway Multi Academy Trust.
- All students have education, health and care plans or statements of special educational needs.
- At present, there are no students under the age of five and there are no girls on roll.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage.

- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The school currently does not receive Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch up funding.
- The school uses a small number of off-site provisions to develop students' personal and social skills. Providers include:
 - Sporting Family Change, Claverton Down
 - HITZ programme, Bath Rugby Club, Bath
 - Laurel Farm, Peasdown St John, Bath.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning throughout the school. These visits to lessons were undertaken jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspector scrutinised students' work across the school and talked informally to students about school and their work.
- Meetings and discussions were held with staff, the headteacher, senior leaders and the chief executive officer.
- Meetings were held with the governing body and with members of the trust.
- The inspector held discussions with four parents and scrutinised three responses to the staff questionnaires. There were no responses from parents on Ofsted's Parent View.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation, including the school pre-employment checks on staff; records of the checks made on teaching, learning and assessment; the school's own assessment information; minutes of governors' meetings; and the school's analysis of attendance, punctuality and behaviour incidents.
- The inspector considered the school's arrangements for the use of the physical education and sports premium for primary schools and the pupil premium for disadvantaged students.

Inspection team

Sarah Mascal, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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