

Inspection of Ash Hill Academy

Ash Hill, Hatfield, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN7 6JH

Inspection dates: 4–5 March 2020

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Ash Hill Academy is a rapidly improving school with a clear mission. Leaders are determined to empower pupils through education. They want them to have real and meaningful choices about their future pathways and careers. The school is full of compassion and care. Pupils are friendly and polite. There is a culture of respect and tolerance. Leaders leave no stone unturned in their efforts to help pupils to thrive and learn well.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils explained that if others do disrupt lessons, it is short-lived and well handled by teachers. Pupils said that while people do fall out, bullying does not often happen. If bullying does occur, staff deal with matters swiftly and effectively. Pupils told inspectors they feel safe and supported in school.

Leaders and teachers are determined that every pupil will do their very best. They go the extra mile for those who need a helping hand. A culture of praise permeates the school. As a result, pupils enjoy learning. They gain a wealth of knowledge in lessons and revisit learning regularly so it is remembered. Relationships within the school are caring, supportive and strong.

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

Leaders have developed a strong and ambitious curriculum. It is carefully designed to enrich pupils' experiences and help them remember what they have learned. They then steadily build up new knowledge. Teachers check learning carefully each lesson. In this way, they identify gaps in learning and misconceptions which they then address. The curriculum is very well established in English, mathematics and science. It has been introduced more recently in other subjects. Pupils study a wide range of subjects in key stages 3 and 4. An increasing proportion of pupils are studying academic subjects. Leaders promote the study of modern foreign languages by helping pupils to appreciate and understand the cultures of other countries. Pupils will visit the Belgium battlefields for the first time this year. Next year, plans are in place for pupils to be able to study more languages including French, Spanish and German.

Teachers know precisely the key knowledge that pupils need to remember. Pupils' extensive knowledge is reflected in their work. Examination outcomes are improving. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers and are confident in explaining their thinking. In mathematics, pupils clearly explained alternative ways to solve a problem using fractions. Classmates listened respectfully and the teacher praised their efforts. In a languages lesson, Year 8 pupils were very excited as they practised speaking French. They spoke fluently, gained confidence rapidly and enjoyed their success.

Teachers' assessments of pupils' learning are effective, especially in English, science and mathematics. Their skilful questioning checks pupils' understanding well.

Occasionally though, some pupils are left behind. This happens when teachers do not check carefully that everyone has understood. Misconceptions develop that are then not addressed quickly enough.

Lessons are calm and purposeful. Poor behaviour is not allowed to disrupt learning. Leaders work hard to help pupils who struggle with their behaviour make the needed changes. As a result, the number of exclusions is falling.

Those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Staff are alert to their different needs. For example, in mathematics, the teaching assistant carefully used pupils' individual plans to give appropriate and timely support.

The majority of pupils attend school regularly. Even so, too many pupils are regularly absent. The school works closely with families, who are often in challenging circumstances, to improve attendance.

Governors are determined to improve the life chances of the pupils in the school. They check that pupil premium funding is appropriately spent. They maintain close oversight of behaviour and safeguarding.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of fundamental British values are developed well throughout the curriculum. They have many opportunities to debate, take on responsibilities, take part in clubs and learn how to keep themselves safe.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are knowledgeable about the local risks to their pupils and work closely with external agencies, including the police, to keep pupils safe. Links with these agencies are strong. Leaders record concerns carefully and report them swiftly to the appropriate authorities. They are tenacious in ensuring that pupils receive the support they need. Leaders check the suitability of adults working at the school.

All staff receive regular safeguarding training and know the procedures they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil.

Pupils told us that they feel safe in school. They are aware, for example, of the dangers of drug traffickers and exploitation. Pupils were confident that anyone in school would help them if the need arose.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On some occasions, pupils do not learn as well as they should. This is because teachers do not always check pupils' understanding in lessons. Leaders should continue to develop how teachers use assessment, so that any misconceptions in pupils' knowledge are addressed quickly, before pupils move on to more complex learning.
- There is a group of pupils that are regularly absent from school. As a result, they are missing out on the opportunity to study the full curriculum. Leaders must continue to work proactively with pupils and their families to help these pupils improve their attendance.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	137066
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	10124214
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	700
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Carol Cartwright
Principal	John Higgins
Website	www.ashhillacademy.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	30 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is no longer recruiting post-16 students. The school intends to formally close this provision at the end of the academic year.
- The school currently uses alternative provision for a number of pupils at: St Wilfrid's Academy, 'Developing Futures', 'Enhancement Training' and 'South Park'.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met the principal and other senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator.
- I met the trust's chief executive officer and also representatives from the academy advisory body.
- We undertook deep dives into the following subjects: English, mathematics, science and history. This involved visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work, talking to pupils about their learning and talking to teachers about their lessons.

Discussions were held with both subject leaders and senior leaders about the curriculum. Other subjects were also considered as part of the inspection.

- We talked to the designated safeguarding lead and looked at records of the actions taken by leaders to protect pupils at risk. We spoke with pupils, staff, governors and school leaders about safeguarding.
- We scrutinised a range of documentation including the checks undertaken on newly appointed staff. We examined subject curriculum plans and considered information about pupils' behaviour, attendance and personal development.
- We observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. We spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about the school.
- We met with the school's alternative provision coordinator and spoke by telephone with a representative of St Wilfrid's Academy.
- We spoke to different members of staff, including recently qualified teachers, a midday supervisor and two support staff, to gauge their views about how well pupils behave and conduct themselves.
- We considered 59 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and considered the 24 responses to a questionnaire for pupils and the 37 responses to a questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

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