

# Inspection of Alpha Learning Staffordshire

Hobson Street, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 2AW

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Inspection dates: 11 to 13 June 2024

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Many pupils have struggled in their previous schools. Some have missed a lot of education. They value the opportunity to have a fresh start here and recognise that their teachers work hard to help them find a positive pathway and to achieve their goals. Most say that they feel safe and happy here.

Leaders want the best for all pupils. They quickly identify where help needs to be focused and encourage pupils to try hard. Sometimes, for those on short-term placements, there is not enough clarity about what they could and should achieve, in the time available, which limits their progress.

Most pupils respond well to the opportunities offered and do their best to meet the school's expectations. However, as pupils settle and begin to make headway, expectations of behaviour are not always increased appropriately. Nonetheless, pupils know and understand how to earn rewards for good behaviours. They are proud of these when they achieve them and keen to share their successes.

Opportunities for pupils to broaden their experiences and understand the wider world are increasing. Visits and visitors are carefully selected and support pupils to keep themselves safe, to treat others with respect and to be ready for the next stage of their lives.

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

The school offers a suitably broad and rich curriculum, which is designed to be ambitious for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. At key stage 4, this is usually adapted effectively in order to meet the additional needs that most pupils have in this school. However, for the small number of key stage 3 pupils at the school, this is often not the case. Most of these pupils are expected to return to mainstream school within a short space of time. However, there has not been enough attention given to the educational content of the placement. In addition, there is limited focus on assessing precisely whether pupils have learned what leaders intend. In contrast, those in key stage 4, although arriving at different points during the academic year, benefit from the length and stability of the placement. They make progress from their starting points and, despite significant gaps in their education, can access suitable qualification routes to support their post-16 aspirations.

Teachers regularly assess pupils' learning during lessons. They are adept at adapting the pace or content of learning to meet pupils' needs. However, formal assessment tasks tend to be set up as broad, 'catch-all' activities. As a result, assessment information is often not precise enough to inform next steps for individual pupils or to identify where the curriculum may need to be revised.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to provide interesting and engaging lessons that offer links with other subjects and the wider world. This

means that pupils are well supported to develop their social and moral understanding as well as to increase their cultural awareness. However, there has not been enough focus or oversight of pedagogical development, to ensure that the best ways of building knowledge over time are understood and used effectively by all teachers.

The school has recognised that many pupils arrive with weaknesses in reading. Teachers have worked hard to ensure that reading is integral to all subject teaching. Pupils say that opportunities to read in each subject area are frequent. As a result, they value reading as an important learning tool but not yet as something to be done for enjoyment. Leaders know this and have plans in place to enrich provision. However, these are at an early stage.

The behaviour of most pupils improves over time, particularly for pupils in key stage 4. However, the school does not yet use the plethora of information gathered and recorded, to inform next steps. As a result, there are missed opportunities to raise expectations over time so that, increasingly, pupils become more able to self-regulate their behaviour.

Personal development days are carefully planned to ensure that pupils are supported to develop resilience and to become more independent. Pupils know how to keep themselves mentally and physically healthy for instance. However, currently the programme is delivered through drop-down days each term. As a result, pupils who join the school at different times of the year or those who are absent can miss significant chunks of the programme.

Leaders have developed an effective programme that supports older pupils to understand the wide range of careers and qualification routes available to them. Pupils are encouraged to identify their aspirations and plan to achieve them. The school now intends to extend this programme to younger pupils.

The headteacher and the proprietor, supported by teaching staff, have worked hard to ensure that, in this first year as a registered school, all independent school standards are met. They have great ambition for their pupils and know what they need to do to ensure that this is realised for all. They have established effective working relationships with parents, carers, local authorities and a range of other partners, always with the needs of their pupils at the heart of what they do.

Staff are proud to work here. They say that leaders take their well-being and workload into account.

The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)**

- Curriculum provision at key stage 3 is not focused enough on what can be achieved in a short 12-week placement to support a successful return to mainstream school. Sometimes, teachers try to do too much and, in the process, the crucial gaps in learning that pupils arrive with are not fully addressed. The school should ensure that they have clarity about what they want pupils to have achieved by the end of their placement.
- Formal assessment does not always measure the right things. This means that assessment information is not informing next steps for pupils or identifying where the curriculum needs to be revised. The school should make sure that assessment is closely matched to planned learning.
- The school does not routinely analyse information gathered about attendance and behaviour. This means leaders are not always aware of patterns and trends that may exist, and this limits their ability to take timely action to further improve behaviour and attendance. The school should ensure that the information they gather has a clear purpose and informs their strategic oversight of what needs to happen next.
- The school's personal development programme supports pupils in many ways, but the delivery model of termly drop-down days does not take into account that pupils start at different times of the year. This means that some do not have planned personal development opportunities for a full term. The school should make sure that the delivery model does not disadvantage some pupils.

## **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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	149601
<b>DfE registration number</b>	861/6036
<b>Local authority</b>	Stoke-on-Trent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10322620
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	27
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	2
<b>Proprietor</b>	Linden Newbon
<b>Headteacher</b>	Nadine Wedgewood
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£130 per day
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 212 807
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://Alphalearningstaffordshire.co.uk">Alphalearningstaffordshire.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:nadine@alphalearningstaffordshire.co.uk">nadine@alphalearningstaffordshire.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- This was the first standard inspection of the school since its registration on 7 June 2023.
- The school uses one unregistered provider.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils also have education, health and care plans.
- The school is registered to admit 35 pupils.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor, the headteacher, who is also the safeguarding lead and the SENCo, the curriculum leader, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in mathematics, English and reading and history. Each deep dive included discussions with curriculum leaders, who are also the subject teachers, and visits to lessons. A scrutiny of pupils' work in these subjects was carried out. Inspectors met with pupils to discuss their learning and more generally about their experiences in school.
- The lead inspector also reviewed the personal, social and health education curriculum and visited lessons in a number of other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning documents and those relating to curriculum and assessment. Inspectors also looked at school policies and records.
- The lead inspector scrutinised safeguarding documents, reviewed the school's processes for reporting concerns and checked recruitment procedures.
- Inspectors checked all the independent school standards, including those relating to the school premises.
- The lead inspector considered responses to Ofsted's parent, pupil and staff surveys.

## **Inspection team**

Mel Ford, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mark Howes

His Majesty's Inspector

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