

Inspection of Aspire School

Vellum Drive, Sittingbourne ME10 5DA

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff build warm, good humoured relationships with pupils and treat them with respect. Many pupils have had a difficult and unsettled time in the education system before joining the school. They often arrive with negative views of learning and poor self-esteem as a result. However, pupils want to learn and they settle into school quickly. They make friends and steadily grow in confidence and self-esteem.

High expectations and clear routines are introduced from the start. These help pupils to feel secure. During the inspection, for example, some of the youngest children, who have just started school, happily sat together in a circle, watching their teacher, and joining in with the actions to songs with great excitement. However, pupils could be helped to do even better academically.

Pupils play energetically but sensibly during break times. They look out for each other and take care of their friends. During the inspection, for example, a pupil suggested that someone who had fallen over 'sit here and rest for a while'. Leaders follow up any concerns about bullying thoroughly.

The school's breakfast club provides a calm and relaxed start to the school day. Pupils happily choose activities from a range of good quality books and toys, chatting with friends as they enjoy toast and cereal.

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

Leaders have overseen a period of significant change since the school opened in September 2020, including rapid expansion. The headteacher and trustees have driven planned developments forward steadfastly, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They have a clear vision for the school's future with carefully considered and ambitious plans in place to support further developments.

Last year, leaders introduced an English and mathematics curriculum. This provides a carefully considered framework for teaching these subjects. Staff training and effective subject leadership has ensured that reading, writing and mathematics are securely established in the school curriculum, from early years onwards. However, the curriculum in other subjects is at a much earlier stage of development. This means that learning in subjects other than English and mathematics is not sequenced well enough from the start of Reception Year to the end of Year 6. Pupils do not learn as well as they should as a result. Leaders have already prioritised the need to improve the wider curriculum and work has begun. The assistant head is working with staff to review what is currently taught.

Leaders have improved phonics teaching in the past year. They have introduced a new phonics programme and have delivered staff training to ensure a consistent approach across the school. This has worked well. Staff are knowledgeable about how to teach phonics and do so confidently. The new phonics programme has

already made a notable difference to pupils' early reading skills across all year groups. They like books and read increasingly well. During the inspection, pupils thoroughly enjoyed reading with an adult, using phonics skills successfully to work out unfamiliar words.

Pupils' personal development lies at the heart of the school's curriculum. Leaders work closely with parents and agencies to plan targets and support for each pupil. Skills to support independence, such as how to use the toilet and how to stay healthy, are taught throughout the school day, as well as through the school's well-designed 'life skills' curriculum. During the inspection, for example, pupils were sensitively encouraged and supported to spread toast with butter and jam. Adults assess pupils' well-being continuously. They have a thorough understanding of pupils' personal needs and respond skilfully when pupils are finding school difficult.

Pupils like being in school. Those who spoke with inspectors enthused about their favourite subjects. Most pupils listen to their teachers quietly and sensibly in lessons. Sometimes pupils become anxious or frustrated and find it hard to behave well. Staff respond quietly and calmly when this is the case, so that pupils feel secure. Pupils gradually learn to recognise their own feelings. They develop strategies which help them to manage situations which they find difficult. The school's therapeutic team provides specialist support and works constructively with parents and staff.

The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Pupils learn the importance of tolerance and respect. The school council helps pupils to learn about rights and responsibilities. Members of the school council made thoughtful suggestions about improvements in the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders use training well to ensure that staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding. Regular updates and ongoing discussions help to keep staff up to date with safeguarding issues. Staff report any concerns promptly and leaders follow these up effectively, working constructively with parents and agencies. Leaders make sure that all required recruitment and suitability checks are completed in a timely manner. The school's curriculum successfully contributes to pupils' increasing understanding of the importance of being safe. Strong relationships with staff help pupils to feel comfortable about sharing worries.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum does not set out what pupils should learn, or the order in which things should be taught, clearly enough in subjects other than English and mathematics. There is too little information about what pupils should learn to

support teaching. This means that learning is not sequenced as well as it should be from the start of Reception Year to the end of Year 6 and pupils learn less well than they should. Leaders should ensure a coherently planned and sequenced curriculum in all subjects.

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.

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	147833
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10256267
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	148
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Simon Mason
Headteacher	Neil Dipple
Website	www.aspire.groveparkacademies.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The numbers of pupils on roll and staff have increased significantly since the school opened in September 2020.
- An assistant head was appointed in September 2022.
- The school is currently transitioning from Grove Park Academies Trust, to Bourne Alliance Multi-Academy Trust.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider, Yew Tree Farm School, Swanton Street, Sittingbourne, HE9 8AT.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 headteacher, assistant headteacher, and other senior leaders. They also spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection.

- The lead inspector met with two trustees and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. Deep dives included visiting a range of lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking with leaders and teachers about how teaching builds pupils' knowledge over time in these subjects.
- The lead inspector met with members of the school council to gather their views of the school. Inspectors also spoke with pupils in lessons, during break times, and around the school.
- Inspectors assessed the school's culture of safeguarding throughout the inspection. The lead inspector reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records. She also checked the single central record.
- The views of staff and parents were gathered through a range of sources, including Ofsted's surveys and informal discussions.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Anne Allen

Ofsted Inspector

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