

Inspection of a good school: Alec Hunter Academy

Stubbs Lane, Braintree, Essex CM7 3NR

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 November 2022

Outcome

Alec Hunter Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at Alec Hunter Academy, and most attend well. The school's motto, 'Kindness above all else', is reflected in the relationships between staff and pupils. Parents and pupils say the school is welcoming. Pupils feel safe and bullying is unusual. Pupils are confident that if bullying happens, staff will deal with it well.

Pupils generally behave well in lessons and around the school. They meet leaders' high expectations of them. Pupils enjoy lessons, listen to teachers and are keen to learn. They receive effective support from teachers and pastoral leaders.

Leaders aim to broaden pupils' horizons and give them better chances in life. Pupils are offered a range of cultural activities. These provide pupils with opportunities to discover more about the world around them. A rich variety of house events, clubs and activities are offered across the curriculum. Pupils have the chance to join in school visits, to places such as Colchester Zoo or Cambridge University, or take part in overseas expeditions. The trips the school offers develop pupils' interests and widen their experiences.

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

Leaders have a clear vision for ensuring that the quality of education continues to improve. They are ambitious for all pupils to do well. For example, leaders want to increase the number of pupils who study the subjects which make up the English Baccalaureate. As a result, most pupils are offered the opportunity to take two modern foreign languages at key stage 3. More pupils now choose to study a language at GCSE. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The curriculum provides a wide range of subjects, in both key stages, to support all pupils to succeed. Leaders work with local primary schools to ensure that pupils build on what they have learned in key stage 2. They make sure that pupils learn new knowledge in a useful order. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to revisit knowledge and concepts they have learned before and make use of what they already know and can do.

Pupils with SEND are well supported and encouraged to take part fully in lessons. Teachers adapt activities and resources, and offer pupils with SEND additional instructions to help them to succeed.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. They show examples of good work to help pupils to see what they need to do better. Teachers correct misconceptions effectively as they arise. Most teachers design activities that help pupils to develop a detailed understanding. When teachers do not provide opportunities for pupils to practise or test their new knowledge, pupils do not remember what they have been taught in sufficient detail.

Reading is an important part of school life, and is encouraged across the curriculum and as reading for pleasure. The weakest readers receive skilled and effective support, which is helping them to become more confident and fluent readers.

The school's 'Learning for Life' curriculum has a clear focus on important issues such as careers education, personal safety and relationships, sex and health education. Assemblies focus on developing pupils' character, supporting their well-being and improving their resilience. Tutorial time helps pupils to make sense of things that are happening around the world and become responsible and tolerant citizens. The school's offer for wider development has a positive effect on behaviour and attitudes. Most parents have positive views about the standards of behaviour, safety and teaching.

Attendance is improving. Despite this, there are a number of pupils who are persistently absent and miss too much school. Leaders work with these pupils to help ensure that they do not fall behind with their learning. More still needs to be achieved for these pupils to return to school.

Staff morale is high. They feel valued by a leadership team that is mindful of their workload. They appreciate the training opportunities offered through the trust. Staff, like many pupils, enjoy being part of Alec Hunter Academy.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained in keeping pupils safe. They understand their responsibilities and know how to report concerns. Vulnerable pupils are identified quickly and receive appropriate help. Pupils know that help is there if they need it, and are not afraid to ask for it.

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum helps pupils to understand risks, such as avoiding gangs and online grooming. The curriculum provides pupils with the information they need to protect themselves and to stay safe.

The trust and governors regularly check that the school fulfils its safeguarding duties. Leaders make sure that background checks of adults are undertaken to determine if they are suitable to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough. They miss too much learning and do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that their approaches to promoting good attendance result in these pupils attending school regularly.
- Some teachers do not routinely provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to practise and test out their newly learned knowledge. This means some pupils do not remember in enough detail what they have been taught. Leaders should ensure that teachers give pupils regular opportunities to practise their new knowledge to help them to achieve well.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2017.

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	139402
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10255165
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,031
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Barrs
Headteacher	Trevor Lawn
Website	www.alechunter.org/
Dates of previous inspection	13 and 14 July 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Saffron Academy Trust.
- The school has been oversubscribed for the past two years.
- The school uses two registered providers for alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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 held meetings with the chief executive officer and members of the trust board. They also met with governors, the headteacher, senior leaders and subject leaders.
- Inspectors did deep dives in English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages as part of this inspection. Inspectors spoke to subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with teachers and pupils for these subjects.

- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils, including single-sex groups of pupils. They also observed behaviour in lessons and during breaktime.
- Inspectors scrutinised documents, including those related to curriculum planning and development, safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and exclusions. They also looked at the school's development plan and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors spoke to staff, including some early career teachers, about their workload. They also talked to them about the amount and quality of training and support they receive from leaders.
- Inspectors considered the 171 responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, the 167 free-text comments from parents and one letter from a parent. Inspectors also considered 61 responses to the staff survey and 82 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Kathryn Herlock, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sally Nutman

Ofsted Inspector

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