

Inspection of ALP Sittingbourne

60 Bell Road, Sittingbourne ME10 4HE

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 September 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend ALP Sittingbourne have often had considerable time out of education. Many begin their time at the school with negative perceptions of school and of learning.

Leaders and staff at ALP Sittingbourne work hard to undo these perceptions and to build positive and trusted relationships with pupils and their families. Staff provide pupils with a safe and secure environment in which pupils can be themselves.

To help pupils become successful learners, staff are trained to recognise and respond to pupils' individual needs. Pupils are taught one to one or in very small groups. Leaders recognise that pupils may find it challenging to sit still and listen for extended periods. Classroom spaces are designed with flexible seating choices. Pupils say that they feel they are heard for the first time by the adults who work with them at school.

Pupils particularly enjoy their time at 'The Lodge', the school's outdoor learning provision. Here, they learn to care for the school's wide range of animals, including a giant tortoise. Pupils become increasingly confident in animal care, and, for example, enjoy collecting and cooking with eggs from the hens. Pupils thrive in the woodland school. They benefit from regular swimming and water-safety lessons in the school's outdoor pool.

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

The expectations of school are new for many of the pupils who join ALP Sittingbourne. Leaders have designed their curriculum to address this. Initially, when pupils join, the focus is on securing good attendance. To do this, leaders have trained staff to focus on building up trusting and positive relationships with pupils. Pupils' initial curriculum is guided by their education, health and care (EHC) plans and developed around their interests.

Leaders have designed an exceptionally enriching personal development programme that supports each pupil to re-engage with education and to understand how school can contribute in a highly positive way to their lives. Pupils' individual talents and interests are developed and nurtured throughout each school day. Provision for each pupil is highly personalised and designed to help pupils reach their full potential now and in the future. Clubs, including music, eco- and dance clubs, run at lunchtimes to ensure that all pupils benefit.

Pupils frequently engage with, and contribute to, the local community. Eco-club, for example, enthusiastically litter picks in the local area, taking great pride in its work. As pupils' confidence in themselves grows, they rediscover a sense of hope for their future. For many pupils, the school's outdoor learning programme has been key. The

programme is not only therapeutic, but also vocational, helping pupils to identify possible qualification and career pathways.

Pupils' well-being is a key priority for leaders. Every pupil's well-being is assessed at regular points throughout the year, and this ongoing assessment feeds into a well-being support plan. When pupils are experiencing a higher level of need in terms of their well-being and/or mental health, leaders work carefully with external experts to ensure that pupils get the support they need.

As pupils become more familiar with the school and its staff, a clear routine is introduced. Staff recognise that pupils have often been without classmates for an extended period. Some will be very nervous about making friends. Staff carefully consider each pupil's peer group and group them accordingly.

Once pupils are attending regularly and have built trusting, positive relationships in the school community, they are gradually introduced to the school's full curriculum. Leaders recognise that pupils are often at an early stage of learning to read when they arrive. Leaders rightly prioritise reading in the school's curriculum. They work with pupils carefully to assess their starting points. Pupils get a range of support with their reading. Staff are successful at challenging pupils' negative perceptions of reading and helping them to develop greater pleasure in books and stories.

Those at an early stage of learning to read receive daily phonics teaching. However, while leaders have provided some phonics training for staff, at present not all staff are sufficiently expert in teaching phonics. Furthermore, pupils do not get enough practice in reading books that match the sounds they have learned.

Alongside reading, leaders prioritise mathematics and personal, social and health education (PSHE). In these subjects, there is a clear and well-sequenced curriculum in place. Leaders have provided staff with training to ensure that they teach these subjects well. The PSHE curriculum is a particular strength of the school. Pupils work through the whole-school curriculum in their classes and, in addition, receive a bespoke PSHE programme that has been tailored to address their specific needs.

In some other subjects, the curriculum is at an earlier stage of development. In art, for example, leaders have designed a curriculum that is primarily experiential and designed to introduce pupils to a range of artists, genres and historical periods. They have not broken down the steps of learning carefully enough.

Across the subjects, pupils can work towards a range of suitable qualifications, including in functional skills. Decisions about qualification pathways are made on an individual basis, in consultation with pupils and their parents and carers. A qualified careers adviser supports pupils to understand their options and possible next steps.

Leaders, including those responsible for governance, have a clear vision for ALP Sittingbourne. Leaders engage very positively with their staff, providing a range of professional development opportunities that enable and enthuse staff to provide pupils with an ever-improving quality of education. The managing director of the

proprietor body works closely with leaders to ensure that the independent school standards are consistently met. 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)

- Not all staff who support pupils at an early stage of learning to read have received sufficient training in the teaching of phonics. In addition, pupils do not get sufficient opportunity to practise reading decodable books that match the letter sounds that they have learned. As a result, pupils do not make as much progress with their reading as they might. Leaders should ensure that all staff who support pupils at an early stage of learning to read have sufficient training. They should ensure that the books pupils use to practise reading match the sounds that they have learned.
- In a small number of subjects, leaders' curriculum thinking lacks clarity. The small steps of learning and how these build over time towards clear end-points have not been considered carefully enough. Pupils do not develop their knowledge and understanding in these subjects as well as they do in others. Leaders should continue to develop and refine the curriculum in these subjects and ensure that all staff have the knowledge and understanding they need to teach these subjects well.

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

Unique reference number	149202
DfE registration number	886/6175
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10286489
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	22
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	ALP Schools Ltd
Chair	Gemma Gosden
Headteacher	Jennifer Thomason
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,408 to £71,876
Telephone number	0203 137 3631
Website	https://alpsittingbourne.co.uk
Email address	jenny.thomason@alpschools.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- ALP Sittingbourne caters for up to 40 mixed-gender pupils between the ages of seven and 19 years. All pupils have an EHC plan for social, emotional and mental health difficulties and/or associated needs. Many pupils also have a diagnosis of autism. Pupils have frequently been out of education for a significant period before beginning at ALP Sittingbourne.
- Since the school's pre-registration inspection in July 2022, the school has opened an outdoor learning provision, called ALP The Lodge. This is located at Lavender Cottage, Westwood Road, Stockbury ME9 7SQ. All pupils on the school's roll spend time at ALP The Lodge as part of their planned curriculum.
- The school has a proprietor body, an executive committee and a local management group that provides governance.
- The proprietor operates four other independent schools: ALP Leicester, ALP Nuneaton, Park View Academy and Pierview Academy.

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 a range of senior staff, including the headteacher, the executive headteacher and the managing director of the proprietor body. The lead inspector met with the chair of the board of directors and with an additional member of the executive committee.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, the arts and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors listened to pupils reading with a familiar adult. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the quality of education provided in other subjects.

- Inspectors carried out other activities to check that the school meets the independent school standards. These included a check of the school premises and wider work to comply with health and safety laws (including fire safety). Inspectors considered the school’s approach to risk management. Inspectors also checked the relevant policies and the school website.
- Inspectors judged the effectiveness of safeguarding by meeting with leaders, discussing records of concern and subsequent actions, and speaking with pupils and staff about this aspect of the school’s work. Inspectors confirmed that the right checks are being made to ensure that all staff and members of the proprietor body are suitable for the posts they occupy.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Caroline Clarke

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023