

St Aldhelm's Academy

Address: Herbert Avenue, Poole, Dorset, BH12 4HS

Unique reference number (URN): 136206

Inspection report: 10 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

This school requires significant improvement

His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires **significant improvement** because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Needs attention

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

While pupils' attendance has improved over time, it remains below national averages, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have taken effective action to address this. They have strengthened the leadership of this area of the school's work. They closely analyse patterns of absence and use this information to inform their actions. Leaders support staff to work with families to understand the barriers to regular attendance while maintaining high expectations. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced significantly over the last 3 years. However, leaders know this work must continue in earnest in order to ensure sustained improvements.

Leaders have taken decisive action to address the entrenched poor behaviour of some pupils. They have created clarity and guidance for staff, which is starting to have a positive impact. For example, low-level disruption has reduced. Most of the time, the school is calm and orderly. However, a significant minority of pupils do not meet the school's expectations of them. As a result, many pupils receive sanctions, including suspensions. While these are reducing, numbers are still high. Some bullying happens and there are incidents of derogatory language, but neither are widespread. Pupils are often ambivalent about school, while acknowledging it has improved in recent times.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Teaching is not consistently effective. High staff turnover has contributed to this. Leaders have an accurate understanding of where there is weaker practice and have taken appropriate action. For example, new curriculums have been put in place in some subjects. These curriculums are broad and ambitious. Teachers benefit from a professional learning programme that is focused on which pedagogical approaches should be used. However, much of this work is very recent. Some staff do not have the expertise to deliver the new curriculum as intended. They do not break knowledge down for pupils, or effectively check pupils' understanding before moving on. Often, the work pupils complete is very simplistic and not connected to prior learning. This means that, in some subjects, learning does not help pupils to develop increasingly detailed knowledge over time.

Teachers sometimes do not use the information and guidance they have about how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. This means appropriate adaptations for pupils with SEND are only made some of the time. In addition, there is no coherent approach to ensuring that all pupils develop strong

foundations in reading, vocabulary and handwriting. Pupils who most need additional help do receive this through targeted interventions.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

It is too soon to see widespread and sustained impact of the school's work to improve inclusive practice. Recently, leaders have taken appropriate action to strengthen the systems in place to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, with support from the trust, the school's identification of speech and language needs is now more accurate. The quality of documentation, such as pupils' individual learning plans, has also improved, as has the information provided to staff to help them adapt teaching to meet pupils' needs. However, this not having a positive impact on all pupils with SEND. Leaders do not ensure that barriers to learning are removed or reduced for some pupils. Typically, staff understand their role in identifying and providing on going support for pupils with SEND. Increasingly, leaders are working well with families and external agencies.

The school uses additional funding appropriately. This has had some positive impact on the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils, including those in the care of the local authority. However, the use of this funding has been less effective in improving pupils' achievement. The school uses a range of alternative provisions. They monitor this carefully, ensuring that pupils are safe and that these provisions meet pupils' needs appropriately.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

The school has experienced a significant period of turbulence, with multiple changes in trust and school leadership. This is now relatively stable. With support from the trust, and underpinned by an effective external partnership with another trust, leaders have taken firm and decisive action in the best interests of pupils. They have drawn on the new trust partnership to improve the breadth and ambition of the curriculum, raise standards of behaviour and drive better attendance. However, the delivery of the curriculum remains too variable to secure the improvements needed in pupils' achievement.

Leaders have strengthened the professional learning programme for staff. This includes greater clarity and support for staff to implement the new behaviour policy. As a result, staff, including those in the early stages of their career, typically feel well supported. They understand their role in driving the necessary improvements in the school, in particular in following a consistent framework for teaching. Nevertheless, staff turnover has been high and, at times, this has had an impact on the pace of change required, and caused some pupils and parents to feel let down.

Trustees understand their statutory duties and have a secure oversight of key areas of the school's work, such as provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They have supported school leaders by commissioning external support because they recognise the need for rapid and sustainable change.

Pupils do not consistently feel a strong sense of belonging and pride in their school. Leaders have taken appropriate action to ensure that pupils are able to build strong and trusting relationships with staff. For example, pupils now spend more time with their tutors in the morning, reading and learning about current affairs. However, these changes have not yet had a positive impact for some pupils because the programme is not delivered consistently well. Those pupils who most need support receive this, but others feel that staff, many of whom are new, do not know them well enough.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe and healthy, including online. They develop a secure understanding about healthy relationships and substance misuse, as well as learning about diversity and different cultures and beliefs. Assemblies often provide additional opportunities to learn about issues and challenges within the community, encouraging pupils to talk about any worries they may have. Currently, leadership and other citizenship opportunities for pupils are limited. However, pupils' understanding of fundamental British values, such as tolerance and respect, is typically secure.

The school organises many enrichment activities, such as residential trips to a farm and a ski trip, a recently reinvigorated music offer and science and technology workshops. Leaders have recognised the need to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing. They have made links within the community to support this, such as organising a boxing programme that includes mentoring and linking with a local youth group. While widespread participation is not high, the school remains ambitious and committed to providing a range of additional activities.

Pupils receive comprehensive careers advice and guidance. This is a strength of the school. Pupils in Year 10 take part in work experience and enjoy attending the careers fair. Pupils are well informed about their next steps.

Urgent improvement

Achievement

Urgent improvement

Pupils do not achieve as well as they should by the end of Year 11. Many pupils leave the school without the knowledge they need, including in English and mathematics, to be successful in the next stage of their education or employment. Gaps in pupils' knowledge are not closed quickly enough. Many pupils move through the school without weaknesses in reading, writing and mathematics being addressed. The quality of pupils' work is often poor. Many pupils are unable to recall their learning or talk with confidence about what they have learned. Consequently, pupils do not make the progress that they are capable of. Disadvantaged pupils achieve significantly less well than their peers, despite sometimes making progress from their starting points. Overall, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make the progress that they should. Recent improvements in teaching have not had time to make a difference to pupils' achievement.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils do not achieve as well as they should. They do not make the progress or achieve the standards that they are capable of across the curriculum. Consequently, many pupils leave the school without the breadth of knowledge needed to be ready for the next stage of their education.

Over time, pupils have not been served well at this school. Frequent changes in leadership and high staff turnover have had a negative impact on the school community. Some pupils have struggled to form strong relationships with staff. A lack of clear expectations and processes have led to poor behaviour and attendance. However, this has improved recently. The school generally feels calm and orderly. Pupils' learning is disrupted less often than in the past. However, currently, many pupils do not have positive attitudes to learning. Bullying is not widespread, but does sometimes happen. Some pupils feel that the use of derogatory language or prejudicial views remain unchallenged. Pupils feel safe at school, but some would like staff to know them better. There are clear plans in place to ensure these recent improvements are sustained.

The quality of teaching is variable. Pupils do not achieve well because, until recently, the curriculum has not been ambitious enough. There has not been a consistent approach to closing gaps in pupils' knowledge, including in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' barriers to learning are not removed or reduced consistently effectively, so some pupils who need additional support do not receive this. Recent improvements to the curriculum and to provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities mean that some pupils are learning more effectively.

The school endeavours to provide a range of enrichment activities, such as residential trips, clubs and workshops. Leaders are ambitious for pupils in this regard and celebrate pupils' successes and participation in newsletters and rewards assemblies. Careers education, advice and guidance is a strength of the school.

Next steps

- Leaders must ensure that there is a clear and coherent approach to closing gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge, including vocabulary, spelling and handwriting.
- Leaders must ensure that pupils' attainment increases at the end of key stage 4, so that pupils are better prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training.
- Leaders must ensure that staff teach curriculum content effectively and check carefully that pupils understand before they move on to new learning, so that they build knowledge and understanding over time and achieve more highly.
- Leaders must ensure that the work pupils complete is appropriately ambitious and matched to their needs.
- Leaders must strengthen their oversight and impact of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the classroom to ensure that adaptations to the curriculum are delivered consistently well so that these pupils make stronger progress from their starting points.

- Leaders must strengthen their work to improve the behaviour of those pupils who repeatedly do not meet the school's expectations.
 - Leaders must ensure that improvements to attendance, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are sustained over time.
 - Leaders must ensure that the programme for pastoral care and personal development is delivered consistently well, so that all pupils are able to build positive and trusting relationships with staff.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Authentic Education Group Ltd, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the interim chief executive officer (CEO), Sir Jon Coles, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alison Beane.

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

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Since the previous inspection, there have been 2 substantive principals and a number of interim leadership arrangements. The current executive principal has been in post since April 2025. The school has been working with another multi-academy trust since November 2025.

Inspectors spoke with the executive principal, head of school, senior leaders, the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator and groups of staff. The lead inspector met executive leaders and those responsible for governance, including the chair of board of trustees.

Inspectors considered responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The school uses ten unregistered alternative provisions and one registered alternative provision.

Lead inspector:

Victoria Griffin, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Andrew Lovett, Ofsted Inspector

Mike Foley, Ofsted Inspector

Helen Kerr, Ofsted Inspector

Steve Smith, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 10 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

841

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

900

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

45.78%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

4.99%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

18.79%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	21.8%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	22.6%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	17.2%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	33.6	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	35.1	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	34.7	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.58	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.59	-0.03	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	6.5%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	17.9%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	7.1%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	23.8	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	29.0	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	29.8	35.0	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.81	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.80	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	6.5%	53.1%	-46.7 pp
2023/24 (final)	17.9%	53.1%	-35.2 pp
2022/23 (final)	7.1%	52.4%	-45.3 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	23.8	50.4	-26.6
2023/24 (final)	29.0	50.0	-21.0
2022/23 (final)	29.8	50.3	-20.5

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.81	0.16	-0.97
2022/23 (final)	-0.80	0.17	-0.96

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	90%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	87%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	89%	94%	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	13.1%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	13.6%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	14.8%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	34.4%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	38.4%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	41.2%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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