

Inspection of Alderwasley Hall School

Higg Lane, Alderwasley, Belper, Derbyshire DE56 2SR

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 July 2025

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this school in an atmosphere that is calm and purposeful. They benefit from the extensive range of opportunities available to them. These are tailored precisely to pupils' individual talents and interests. Pupils are adamant that their views are listened to and that things change for the better as a result. As one pupil typically explained, 'There are so many choices on offer and lots to help you to thrive.'

Staff are ambitious that all pupils will lead independent lives and play a full part in their world. Bespoke pathways are planned so that pupils can achieve as well as possible and be well prepared for adult life. This approach is highly successful. Pupils are absorbed by their learning. As they approach adulthood, almost all of them pursue appropriate further or higher education courses or gain high-quality training or employment opportunities.

Relationships between pupils and staff are exceptionally warm and caring. Pupils' understanding of their own needs is skilfully developed. Over time, pupils learn to manage their emotions independently. Staff anticipate behavioural 'bumps in the road' and sense signs that pupils are struggling to control their feelings straight away. Routines, including movement breaks, are well established. Pupils feel welcome, safe and included.

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

The work of the school transforms the lives of its pupils. Many start at the school following long periods of absence from education and with gaps in their knowledge. Before pupils start attending, staff get to know their needs really well. A well-tailored approach is in place so that each pupil gets off to the best possible start. Pupils' attendance grows rapidly as a result.

The school's extensive team of therapists use their specialist knowledge effectively to put individual plans in place for each pupil. This ensures that pupils become 'classroom ready'. Tailored support continues as pupils start to work alongside their peers. Therapists, teachers and support staff work together to make sure that everyone knows exactly how to help each pupil.

Pupils follow highly individualised programmes. This means that pupils work on precisely what they need to learn next. Some pupils are at an early stage of learning to read. They get lots of chances to practise the sounds that they have not yet mastered. Daily reading of well-matched books builds pupils' confidence and fluency. Alongside this, pupils learn what words mean. This helps them to understand more challenging texts. As a result, almost all pupils become fluent readers, who are able to access age-appropriate materials by the time they leave the school.

The school's individualised approach to the curriculum supports pupils to achieve well. For example, many make the progress necessary in mathematics to be able to

take suitable qualifications. Pupils are extremely proud of their achievements. There are opportunities to learn a wide range of subjects in the sixth form. The school adapts the curriculum offer every year to take into account students' different interests. Teachers have expert subject knowledge. Staff expertly adapt how they teach so that each pupil can make the best progress. Misconceptions are spotted straight away and staff work sensitively with pupils to help them to improve their understanding and learn securely.

Immense care is taken over what pupils need to learn to be ready for their next steps. Preparation for independent living is woven skilfully throughout the curriculum. For instance, pupils experience managing their money when shopping. They learn to shower and wash their hair following weekly swimming lessons. They practise using public transport as they prepare to study in other settings. This deliberate planning means that pupils thrive. The school uses innovative ways to help pupils consider a wide range of relevant careers. For example, they provide pupils who have an interest in animals to learn how to exercise them. The school works closely with the local community to provide pupils with experience of caring for livestock. Pupils' aspirations are nurtured and cherished as part of the careers programme.

The impact of the work to develop pupils' character is profound. Many pupils find it hard to live and play together when they join the school. Carefully planned sessions enable pupils to begin to interact effectively with others. They learn to accept each other's points of view. Pupils' confidence grows significantly. Over time, many pupils become eloquent individuals, who can express themselves clearly, show empathy for others and speak respectfully on their behalf. Students in the sixth form typically explain how their time at the school has enabled them to be proud of who they are, with aspirations and ambitions for their future.

Pupils can clearly explain how fair choices are made and how these affect their lives. For example, they can explain how they get a say in the wider range of trips and visits that take place. They have an exceptionally strong understanding of equality, diversity and important values, such as tolerance and democracy. For instance, primary-age pupils enjoy learning about a range of faiths and cultures through visiting places of worship, exploring food and festivals. Meanwhile, secondary-age pupils reflect on the moral issues raised by the Second World War. Students in the sixth form can explain how weekly 'collective thoughts' help them to be mindful of the diversity of beliefs that there are in the world.

Staff are fulsome in their praise of leaders. The school's investment in staff makes them feel valued. A wealth of training enhances their strong subject knowledge. Staff learn from each other's specialisms. They say that leaders are highly mindful of their workload and well-being and make supportive changes. This is a happy place to work.

The proprietor body has exceptionally clear processes in place to ensure that the school meets the independent school standards in full. Pupils benefit from the well-maintained facilities that are enhanced and adapted as pupils' interests develop and

change. The proprietor body provides innovative opportunities for leaders to deepen their knowledge and develop professionally. Leaders value this and appreciate the support for their well-being. Those involved in leading the school, including the proprietor body, fully understand their statutory duties and ensure that the school complies with Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	113021
DfE registration number	830/6016
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10374813
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 20
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	127
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	45
Number of part-time pupils	12
Proprietor	The SENAD Group Limited
Chair	Brian Jones
Headteacher	Sara Forsyth
Annual fees (day pupils)	£82,900 to £166,141
Telephone number	01629 822586
Website	www.senadgroup.com/alderwasley
Email address	alderwasley.info@senadgroup.com
Dates of previous inspection	12 to 14 July 2022

Information about this school

- Alderwasley Hall school is an independent special school. It is based on two sites. Pupils in key stages 2 and 3, and in Year 10, attend the site at Higg Lane, Alderwasley, Belper, Derbyshire DE56 2SR. Pupils in Year 11 and students in key stage 5 attend the site located at Derby Road, Wirksworth, Derbyshire DE4 4BN.
- The school is registered to provide education for a maximum of 138 pupils aged 5 to 20 years. At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils in key stage 1.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school admits pupils who have a diagnosis of autism. In addition, many pupils have speech, language and communication needs. Most have social, emotional and mental health needs. Almost all pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils who attend the school travel from many local authorities. Most travel from neighbouring local authorities.
- 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.
- Students who are above the compulsory age for education pursue a curriculum that is appropriate to their needs, including completing qualifications and preparing for adulthood.
- Since the previous inspection, an emergency inspection took place on 17 September 2024.
- The school's most recent standard inspection took place from 12 to 14 July 2022.

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 evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives into the following subjects: early reading; mathematics; personal, social, health and economic education and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum,

visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The lead inspector listened as pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors considered a range of evidence about other curriculum subjects, including art and design, and food technology.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed through the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors spoke with members of staff throughout the inspection and considered the views expressed through Ofsted's staff survey.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interest first.
- Throughout the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils. This included during unstructured parts of the day, such as breaktimes and lunchtimes. They also considered the views of pupils expressed through Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- The lead inspector met with a member of the proprietor board and the group's director of education.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They considered a range of documents.

Inspection team

Hazel Henson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Sheppard

Ofsted Inspector

Dawn Ashbolt

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 2025