

Inspection of Axminster Community Primary Academy

Stoney Lane, Axminster, Devon EX13 5BU

Inspection dates:	13 and 14 May 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher is Claire Hulbert. This school is part of the First Federation Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Paul Walker, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alexander Walmsley.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe at this inclusive school. They benefit from staff's care and understanding of how to meet pupils' individual needs. This includes the youngest children in the Nursery and Reception Year, who get off to the positive start that they need.

The school has raised its expectations of pupils' achievement. Recent improvements to the curriculum in key stages 1 and 2 mean that pupils learn more and remember more. Pupils are motivated to learn and eager to share their knowledge. For example, older pupils can talk in great detail about Greek mythology, rivers and continents, and how to write a persuasive letter.

Most pupils live up to the school's high expectations of their behaviour. Occasionally, a minority of pupils disrupt learning or do not treat others as the school expects them to. Pupils who sometimes struggle to regulate their own behaviour benefit from sensitive support from staff. They are helped to manage their emotions successfully.

Pupils learn how to care for themselves and others. Pupil 'mental health ambassadors' take an active role in promoting the well-being of their peers. Older pupils are proud to be 'buddies' for younger children. Pupils are proud to be members of the school or sports council. These experiences help to develop pupils' sense of responsibility.

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

Published data does not reflect the quality of education provided by the school. In 2024, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 was significantly below the national average. The school has identified the reasons for these outcomes. It has taken effective steps to address weaknesses in the previous curriculum. In addition, the school has ensured that the considerable and increasing number of pupils at the school who are disadvantaged and/or have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) continue to have their needs met. For example, leaders provide useful information so teachers can adapt the curriculum for these pupils.

Pupils deepen their knowledge and skills across the curriculum. In each subject, the school has carefully considered what pupils will learn and when. For example, in art and design, pupils develop their skills in drawing and broaden their range of sketching techniques over time. In mathematics, they learn multiplication tables fluently so that they can apply their knowledge to solve mathematical problems.

The school has successfully provided appropriate training for teachers to strengthen further their subject knowledge. As a result, teachers present new information clearly and correct pupils' misconceptions effectively. In the early years, teaching has a sharp focus on children's language. Staff match activities well to children's starting points. For instance, children with additional needs receive extra support to develop their physical or communication skills.

Pupils benefit from an effective early reading programme, including those who need support to catch up. Children get to know familiar stories and poems well in the Nursery and Reception Years. The school ensures that staff match teaching and books precisely to pupils' reading ability. As a result, pupils are supported to build their phonics knowledge and read with increasing accuracy and confidence.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and work well together. Most pupils have good attendance. However, absence continues to be too high for a minority of pupils. The school is tenacious in identifying patterns in pupils' absence and removing barriers to their attendance. Nonetheless, some pupils develop gaps in their knowledge because they do not attend school regularly enough.

The school has designed an effective personal, social and health education programme. For example, older pupils learn what makes a good friendship. They know about online risks and how to keep themselves safe. Children in the early years learn how to take turns when completing an activity together. Strong routines help them learn when to listen. This builds strong foundations for cooperating with each other.

Pupils develop secure knowledge of equality and the rule of law. They understand that people may be disabled for many different reasons and that any form of discrimination is wrong. The school develops pupils' knowledge of diversity through the books they read and visitors to the school. Pupils know that it is important to be kind to everyone and to celebrate their differences.

The school is ambitious to develop pupils' talents and interests. For example, pupils spoke with an astronaut in space. Some pupils participate in the extra-curricular activities on offer, such as sports and music. However, these activities are limited in scope, and the school does not support pupils to benefit from these experiences as well as it could.

Trustees fulfil their role effectively. They gain sharp insights into the school's work and support leaders to make the right improvements. Trustees and leaders are mindful of staff workload and considerate of their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not attend regularly enough. As a result, they sometimes develop gaps in their knowledge and skills, which hinders their learning. The school should ensure that it works closely with parents and carers to reduce absences so pupils do not miss vital learning opportunities.

- The school does not support pupils well enough to gain beneficial experiences beyond the classroom. This limits the development of pupils' wider skills, talents and interests. The school should ensure that there is a suitable range of extra-curricular opportunities and support pupils to make good use of them.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	141523
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10375598
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	293
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alexander Walmsley
CEO of the trust	Paul Walker
Headteacher	Claire Hulbert
Website	axminster.acornacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	21 and 22 January 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- The school is part of First Federation trust. It joined the trust in September 2024.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school has a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils, including with pupils with SEND.
- The school provides education for two-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, art and design and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils’ work. An inspector listened to a sample of pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors held discussions with school and trust leaders. Inspectors analysed school documentation, including leaders’ evaluations and plans for improvement. Inspectors scrutinised a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum, SEND, safeguarding and behaviour. An inspector also held discussions with a group of trustees.
- Inspectors observed pupils’ behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- 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’ interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View and parents’ free-text comments. An inspector met with some parents at the beginning of the school day.
- Inspectors spoke with staff to gather their views about the school and evaluated their responses to Ofsted’s staff survey.

Inspection team

James Oldham, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

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