

Inspection of a good school: Belmont Castle Academy

Parker Road, Grays, Essex RM17 5YN

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 May 2021

Outcome

Belmont Castle Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are excited to be back at school. They are of the view that staff 'care about' them and enjoy school as 'they do special events for us'.

Pupils say that before the pandemic they benefited from an array of wider development opportunities. In the words of the pupils, there are 'activities to suit everyone'. While school life is not totally back to how it was, leaders have made sure pupils still have access to some of these opportunities, for example via online events or through safety-controlled visits on site. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the recent mental health week. Almost all pupils who responded to the Ofsted survey agreed that teachers encourage them to look after their mental and physical health.

Pupils play well together. Pupils know they are to respect each other's differences. The teachers' focus on being kind means that pupils will go out of their way to help each other. This begins from the day they enter school, where younger children learn to share. Pupils are clear on what bullying is, and know to report it to an adult if it happens. Pupils say that bullying hardly ever happens and that they trust an adult to resolve any issues.

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

Reading is at the heart of the school's curriculum. This begins in Nursery, where children enjoy rhymes and early reading books that capture their interest. Pupils then follow a coherent and considered phonics programme when they are learning to read. Teachers are precise in their guidance to pupils. This means that pupils quickly gain confidence in recognising and using sounds accurately in their reading. Pupils are eager to have a go at reading unfamiliar words. Pupils are successful because teachers closely match the books pupils read to the sounds they know. As pupils progress through school they read a wide

variety of genres and authors. Leaders have thought carefully about how pupils' literary knowledge builds over time.

Mathematics teaching is well planned. Teaching staff support pupils' learning with a focus on key vocabulary, recalling previous learning and repeating the teaching of important ideas. This helps pupils build their knowledge and understanding over time. There is a well-considered balance between investigations and instruction in the science curriculum. Teachers are developing their subject knowledge to make sure they can explain fully and accurately when pupils ask them scientific questions.

In some subjects, such as geography and history, teachers are still getting to grips with the main subject knowledge they are teaching. The curriculum plans for history are less clear about the content teachers are to teach. In some lessons, pupils are not given opportunities to revisit significant areas of learning over time.

The curriculum in early years focuses on helping children to become confident and successful learners. Staff show children what good speaking and listening looks like, so children can develop their speech and communication skills. Staff in Nursery focus closely on helping pupils with their individual needs. For example, staff work with a child on their fine motor skills while working with another child on number. Children in Reception work well together, chatting happily about size and shape while making rockets. Activities help pupils to explore the environment while also developing their early mathematical skills.

Teachers cater well for pupils who are learning to speak English and for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers think carefully about the approaches they use to help pupils access the curriculum. For example, the use of the nurture rooms in early years is making a difference to young children who find managing their emotions difficult. Teaching assistants know the needs of pupils well. They work closely with teachers to give pupils the right support. Some teachers use support plans well, for example modifying pupils' targets as pupils progress and setting clear time-related goals. However, this is not consistent across the school.

Provision for pupils' wider development is a strength of the school. Leaders have reviewed the personal, social and health education curriculum to help pupils manage the impact of the pandemic on their day-to-day lives. Pupils speak maturely about how they manage their emotions and well-being. Behaviour is positive around the school and in lessons. Pupils receive many opportunities to learn about the wider world and how to contribute to society. For example, pupils take part in charity work and run a 'pupil parliament'.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that support for pupils with SEND may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are clear about the local risks that pupils face as well as those posed by the internet. Staff make sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe and how to seek support should they need it. Staff know pupils very well and take prompt action when they have concerns. The strong focus on mental health and well-being means that staff can pick up any early signs that pupils are struggling. This makes sure families get the help they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, such as history, plans are not clear about what content teachers need to teach. This is also the case with guiding teachers to revisit key ideas and information. Leaders need to make sure that teachers understand clearly the content they are to teach and when to revisit learning so that pupils remember important knowledge over time and build upon what they have learned.
- Teachers are using support plans for pupils with SEND in different ways. Some approaches are more effective than others. Leaders need to ensure that best practice is shared and that teachers are consistent in their approach so that all pupils with SEND are supported 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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2016.

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 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school [here](#).

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	139105
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	10193969
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	705
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Steve Smith
Principal	Mark Jones
Website	www.s562128340.websitehome.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	24 November 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The senior leadership team is larger than it was at the previous inspection. More leaders have whole-school responsibilities.

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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with governors, leaders, staff and pupils about the school's provision. In particular, they asked pupils what it is like to be a pupil at this school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and how they conducted themselves around school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, science, geography and history to evaluate the quality of education at the school. They spoke to senior leaders and subject leaders about the curriculum. They spoke to teachers and pupils. They looked at pupils' work in those subjects.

- Inspectors looked at the plans for the early years curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors spoke with pupils about how they are taught about safety. They spoke with staff and leaders about safeguarding. They looked at the school's policies, procedures and records.
- Inspectors scrutinised governors' minutes, the principal's reports to governors, curriculum plans and the school's website.
- Inspectors gathered pupils' views when talking to them in groups. They also considered the 182 responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils.
- Inspectors considered the 42 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.
- Inspectors took into account the 20 responses to Ofsted's Parent View, and read the 13 free-text comments. They also spoke with parents when they dropped off their children at school.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Fiona Webb

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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