

Inspection of a good school: Knutsford Academy

Bexton Road, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0EA

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 November 2021

Outcome

Knutsford Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff encourage the pursuit of excellence for all pupils and students at Knutsford Academy. Staff carefully nurture the confidence of pupils. Pupils have high aspirations for what they can achieve academically, personally and socially.

Pupils and students feel safe and well supported. They said that teachers know them well and care for them as individuals. Pupils value the positive relationships that staff form with them. Pupils believe that they can always approach staff. They trust staff to help them if they need it.

Pupils and students behave consistently well in lessons and around school. Typically, they engage positively with staff and enjoy a calm, orderly and respectful environment. Bullying and other types of poor behaviour are uncommon. On the rare occasions where there is poor behaviour, pupils said that staff challenged individuals well.

Pupils and students value others from different backgrounds. They learn about differences and respect. Pupils said that most pupils treat others well.

Pupils and students enjoy extensive access to sports, arts, language and other subject-specific opportunities. For example, pupils are excited about the preparations for this year's school production. They said that there is genuinely something for everybody at Knutsford Academy.

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

Governors, leaders and staff at Knutsford Academy are highly ambitious for all pupils and students.

Leaders diligently monitor the quality of education that pupils receive. Through well-founded improvements, they are ensuring that more pupils are choosing to study a suitably broad and balanced range of subjects. Consequently, pupils and students make positive next steps in their education, employment and training.

Leaders have refined and strengthened subject plans in recent years. They ensure that pupils and students study units of work in a carefully considered order. In many subjects, plans provide a detailed insight into the important knowledge that pupils will learn. Pupils and students in these subjects acquire new knowledge securely and confidently.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They carefully plan and deliver subject matter clearly. Typically, pupils and students respond positively to the demanding work that teachers ask them to do. Teachers provide good support for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and those who are disadvantaged. This contributes to pupils' good achievement across a range of subjects.

Teachers' use of assessment strategies is developing well but at different rates. In some subjects, pupils and students receive refined feedback that explicitly identifies what they know and remember. This is because teachers design assessment activities that are precisely focused on the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. Elsewhere, teachers provide useful feedback to pupils and students about what they can do. However, these pupils are less able to identify what they know and remember to aid future learning.

Most pupils and students join the school with reading abilities that allow them to confidently access the curriculum. They strengthen their vocabulary and further develop their confidence to read in well-designed form time activities. Leaders identify and provide constructive support for pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning to read. They have suitable plans in place to diagnose the specific reading needs of these pupils with greater precision.

Form tutors confidently deliver a skilfully designed personal, social, health and citizenship programme to all pupils and students. Pupils gain a strong understanding of risk, responsibilities and how to form positive relationships. Staff carefully plan age-appropriate opportunities for pupils of all ages to think about careers and their futures. Pupils said that these opportunities prepare them extremely well for the choices that they face as they move through the school. Staff deftly supplement these planned programmes with additional opportunities that further enhance pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

Leaders make appropriate use of a wide variety of information in order to identify the needs of pupils and students with SEND. Staff provide well-matched additional support for pupils who need it. Leaders thoughtfully enhance this support with well-chosen help from expert professionals.

Leaders and staff are united in their pursuit of excellence for pupils and students. They work together well to set and achieve ambitious goals. Leaders listen to staff and carefully consider how they can support them. Increasingly, leaders have acted positively to help staff with their workload and well-being. Consequently, staff are typically positive about what leaders do to support them.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff have a thorough understanding of the safeguarding issues that pupils and students might face. They use guidance and training effectively in order to continually update their knowledge of safeguarding matters. Pupils are taught well about how they can keep themselves as safe as possible.

Staff are vigilant to possible concerns about pupils. They report them effectively. This helps leaders to provide appropriate, specific support for pupils and students who need it.

Leaders work well with other safeguarding partners. They ensure that all types of safeguarding concerns are handled in a timely and appropriate manner.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some variation in how well subject plans set out the important knowledge that pupils and students should learn. This means that in some subjects, assessment is not always tightly linked to the intended learning. Pupils and students in these subjects do not always receive as high-quality feedback about what they know and remember as they do elsewhere. Leaders should ensure that plans in all subjects are equally clear about the important knowledge that pupils will learn. Additionally, they should provide staff with the support that they need to ensure that assessment is focused on this important knowledge.

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 evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Knutsford High School, to be good in November 2011.

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.

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.

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	138002
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10199655
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1203
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	173
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of trust/Chair of governing body	Catriona Millson
Headteacher	James Whittaker
Website	www.knutsfordacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 March 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Knutsford Academy joined The Learning Alliance multi-academy trust in September 2020.
- The academy has two sites in close proximity. Pupils in Years 7 are educated at one site. Pupils and students in all other year groups are educated at another site.
- At the time of the inspection, no pupils or students were being educated at alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders. They met with representatives of the academy trust, local governing body and Cheshire East local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and history. 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 reviewed the school's records of safeguarding checks and referrals. They met with leaders who have overall responsibility for safeguarding. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils about the school's work to keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders responsible for SEND and reading. They also looked at information about the support for pupils who have additional needs.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class and around the school site. They also scrutinised behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils from all year groups and considered the responses of pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff and considered the responses of staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors took account of the responses of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including the comments received by Ofsted's free-text facility.

Inspection team

Michael Pennington, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nell Banfield	Ofsted Inspector
Helen O'Neill	Ofsted Inspector

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