

Inspection of Knowle DGE Academy

Leinster Avenue, Knowle, Bristol BS4 1NN

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 February 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff's expectations of pupils are inconsistent, and they are not challenged enough. Therefore, pupils do not develop knowledge and understanding well enough. They do not behave as well as they could.

Leaders and staff have a deep understanding of pupils' complex needs and the challenges they face. They get to know pupils very well. Many pupils have had negative experiences of education in the past. Staff work hard to nurture pupils so that they are happy and safe. Pupils' trust in school is rebuilt so they can learn. One pupil summarised this as, 'This school helps everyone in different ways.'

Pupils are confident that adults will sort things out if they go wrong. If bullying happens, staff take it seriously and act quickly. Leaders and staff prioritise supporting pupils to become confident citizens who are physically and mentally healthy.

Even with the challenges of the recent pandemic, leaders remain highly ambitious for the school. They have strengthened the curriculum and safeguarding practices. They know what they need to do next so that the quality of education and behaviour become more consistent, and pupils are challenged more.

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

The school rightly prides itself on nurturing pupils well so that they become more engaged in education. Pupils talk movingly about how Knowle DGE is better than their previous schools. They feel well looked after by the adults who care for them. There are warm relationships between staff and pupils. Staff enthusiastically celebrate the success of pupils. Pupils become more confident. They increase their belief in themselves.

The sixth form is a strength. There is a suitable range of courses on offer. English and mathematics remain a high priority for students. They become confident in subjects such as performing arts and animal care. Students are engaged and go on to a range of suitable destinations.

Leaders have strengthened the curriculum. Subjects such as early reading, primary English, art and mathematics are well thought through. Leaders have adopted common approaches to developing early reading and mathematics. They ensure that teachers are trained in these approaches. Teachers have a clear structure and know what needs to be taught. Pupils become increasingly confident readers because of daily reading and a more consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. They are also becoming more confident mathematicians. However, teachers do not always have high enough expectations of pupils. As a result, some pupils are not challenged enough. Teachers use different assessment methods, even so, work is not always well-matched to pupils' capabilities.

Leaders have strengthened the priority given to reading for pleasure. They have introduced several new initiatives, including a vending machine that dispenses books. However, these have yet to result in pupils reading widely and challenging themselves.

Many pupils come to the school because of severe emotional, mental health or behavioural issues. Leaders have adapted the approach of the school. The focus is now on nurturing pupils and understanding the complexity of their needs. This has been successful in increasing the engagement of pupils and reducing serious incidents. However, behavioural expectations are not always clear or high enough. Disruptive behaviour and lack of engagement are still evident. These are not dealt with consistently by staff.

The school's work to support pupils' personal development is a strength. The 'Ways of Well-being' curriculum ensures that pupils develop a greater awareness of themselves. This covers their health, well-being, community and values. Leaders supplement core subjects with topics that are tailored to the specific challenges that pupils face. There is a wide range of visitors to the school and opportunities beyond the school to enhance pupils' cultural capital and views of the world. Careers education has a high priority in the school and the sixth form. 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.

Academy councillors and senior and middle leaders are highly ambitious for the school and pupils. They share an accurate view of the priorities for the school. Due to the nature of pupils' emotional needs, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on many of the pupils. Leaders have responded to this well, in addition to the resulting impact on staff. Staff say they feel well supported.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders' and staff's commitment to understanding the complex needs of pupils underpins the school's approach to safeguarding. Staff use appropriate processes to identify and manage concerns. The school works well with a range of partners. The curriculum is amended according to the needs of pupils and issues that are concerning in the school and the wider community.

Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on staff who work in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils do not always learn as well as they should. This is because the curriculum is not challenging enough, implementation is inconsistent, and expectations are too low. Leaders should ensure that assessment is being used well and check that the curriculum is being implemented effectively.
- The school's expectations for behaviour and conduct are not clear enough. This means that disruption or the lack of pupils' engagement is not challenged consistently. Leaders need to define their expectations more clearly. They need to ensure that the routines and approaches that are in place to manage and improve behaviour are implemented.

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	144655
Local authority	City of Bristol
Inspection number	10212146
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	160
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Stephen Bradshaw
Headteacher	Kate Lee-Wells (interim)
Website	www.knowle-dge.learnmat.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Knowle DGE Academy converted to become an academy special school, part of the Learn@ Multi-Academy Trust, in September 2017. When its predecessor school, Knowle DGE, was last inspected in November 2014, it was judged to be good overall.
- The substantive headteacher is currently on secondment.
- The sixth form is about to move into purpose-built accommodation on the same site.
- The school runs a respite provision, 'The Lodge'. This is currently closed.
- The school uses 10 alternative providers.
- The school takes pupils who have learning difficulties, speech, language and communication difficulties, autism spectrum disorder, and social, emotional and mental health needs. Leaders are currently working with Bristol City Council to define the school's designation and roll more accurately.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with members of the academy council, senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector spoke with the school's school improvement partner online.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, art and personal, social and health education. They met with subject leaders, visited lessons, talked to pupils and teachers, looked at pupils' work and observed pupils reading to adults.
- Inspectors looked at the policies and procedures used to keep pupils safe. They also reviewed the checks carried out by leaders on the suitability of adults who work in the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, the online questionnaire, and the free-text responses. They also considered responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

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