

Inspection of Folkestone Academy

Academy Lane, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5FP

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 April 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to this inclusive and vibrant school. Their education has substantially improved over the past three years, due to the substantial changes that leaders have made. Leaders, including trustees, are extremely ambitious for pupils. The school is a caring community where staff know pupils well.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. The school is calm and purposeful. Pupils behave well and are respectful towards each other. Those who need extra help to manage their behaviour respond well to it.

Pupils feel safe. They understand whom to talk to if they are worried about something. Pupils can ask for help by using the 'worry button' on the school website or the 'worry boxes' in school. Bullying is uncommon. When it does happen, staff deal with it effectively.

Leaders are committed to promoting equality and diversity. Pupils and staff readily celebrate difference. Pupils enjoy a wide range of rich experiences that help them to develop their interests. For example, pupils are keen to be involved in the school's Combined Cadet Force. Others are keen to take part in the school's talent show or to go on visits to the theatre.

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

Leaders and trustees have worked tenaciously to improve the school. They are unwavering in their determination to ensure that pupils are provided with the very best education, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to the school community. Leaders have managed these challenges extremely well and ensured that their plans for improvement have remained on track.

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. They structure and organise learning carefully. Leaders identify the needs of pupils with SEND accurately and quickly. Pupils with SEND achieve well because staff use thoughtfully constructed education plans to support pupils effectively.

Pupils study a broad range of subjects. Leaders recognise the need for more pupils to study the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects at GCSE. Progress has been made towards this aim and most pupils in key stage 4 now study history or geography. However, not enough pupils study languages at GCSE.

Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to make learning interesting and engaging. They are extremely positive about the high-quality training provided by leaders and the trust. Teachers work closely with each other and with teachers from other schools in the trust. This has helped teachers to reflect on and improve their teaching. Consequently, pupils achieve well across a wide range of subjects.

Students in the sixth form are supported in achieving increasingly high outcomes through the high-quality care and guidance they receive from staff.

Reading is a priority. Weaker readers in key stage 3, including some pupils with SEND, benefit from a phonics-based approach. Staff deliver extra support for pupils effectively. This helps pupils who struggle with reading to catch up quickly.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. Staff provide well-tailored support for pupils who need to modify their behaviour. Leaders' changes to behaviour systems have significantly reduced the proportion of pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions. Leaders' strategies to improve pupils' attendance have reduced the proportions of pupils who are persistently absent. However, overall attendance needs to improve further, including in the sixth form.

Leaders promote pupils' personal development well, including in the sixth form. The school's personal, social, health and economic education programme is well considered and designed around the needs of pupils. High-quality careers guidance prepares pupils to make well-informed choices about their potential next steps after Year 11 and Year 13.

There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence and talents. For example, several pupils in Year 7 apply to join the creative arts scholarship programme. This provides enrichment opportunities in creative arts, such as subsidised trips to dance performances. Pupils are beginning to benefit from the trust's recently introduced 'Turner 25' programme, which provides 25 wider curriculum activities for all pupils.

Staff feel very well supported by leaders and the trust. Leaders design school policies so that they contribute to making staff's workload manageable. Staff feel valued and motivated. Early careers teachers receive high-quality training and guidance.

Trustees and governors are experienced and highly reflective. They are committed to promoting the well-being of staff and pupils. The trust has provided leaders with extensive support. Trustees understand what needs to improve further and how funding should be used to achieve the trust's ambitious aims.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on employees and volunteers and that robust systems are in place to safeguard pupils. Staff have secure knowledge of safeguarding procedures and know what to do if they are worried about a pupil. Leaders provide pupils with appropriate support in school and refer pupils to external agencies if needed. Clear systems are in place to record staff's concerns about pupils and the actions that are necessary to make sure pupils are supported effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders are ambitious for pupils. However, not enough pupils study the full range of EBacc subjects at GCSE. Leaders should further improve the ambition of the curriculum so that higher proportions of pupils study all EBacc subjects by the end of Year 11.
- Although leaders' strategies to improve pupils' attendance have reduced the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent, pupils' attendance needs to improve further. Leaders need to continue to strengthen the strategies they have put in place to improve pupils' attendance, so that attendance improves.

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	145420
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10227677
Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1207
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	129
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Buchanan
Headteacher	Seamus Murphy (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.folkestoneacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the Turner Schools multi-academy trust in December 2017.
- Prior to August 2020, Folkestone Academy was an all-through school incorporating pupils in key stages 1 to 5. The school split in August 2020 and pupils in key stages 1 and 2 now attend Folkestone Primary School.
- The executive headteacher joined the school in April 2019 and became the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust in March 2020. The head of school was appointed in May 2020.
- A small proportion of pupils attend alternative provision at Birchwood Pupil Referral Unit, Folkestone.
- 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

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 held meetings with the executive headteacher (CEO), senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, trustees and governors.
- On the first day of the inspection, inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history, art and physical education. This meant that, in each subject, inspectors met with subject leaders, talked to pupils, visited lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans in other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff from meetings with groups of staff and from the 71 staff who responded to Ofsted's confidential questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils from meetings and informal conversations and from the 219 pupils who responded to Ofsted's confidential questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, including the central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- Inspectors considered the views of 111 parents who responded to the confidential Ofsted parental questionnaire and 69 parents who provided free-text comments.

Inspection team

Harry Ingham, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Eliot Hodges	Ofsted Inspector
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