

# Inspection of a good school: Poplars Community Primary School

St Margaret `s Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4HN

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Inspection dates:

28 and 29 June 2022

## **Outcome**

There has been no change to this school `s overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Poplars is a happy and safe place for pupils to be. Pupils know the expectations. Most pupils behave well in lessons and during break times. They enjoy the incentives they receive when they follow the school rules. A significant minority of pupils are not behaving well enough. As a result, they often miss out on valuable learning time.

Bullying sometimes happens but it is dealt with by adults in the school. If pupils have concerns, they know who to talk to. Older pupils try to resolve friendship issues amongst themselves. Pupils are usually kind, caring and respectful.

The curriculum pupils currently receive is not consistently well delivered. This means sometimes pupils learn what is intended, but at other times they are not given the knowledge they need to be able to achieve well. Furthermore, there are also too many pupils struggling to learn to read. For these pupils, accessing the curriculum is an added challenge.

Pupils enjoy the wider experiences that the school offers. They talk excitedly about trips and visitors. For example, visits to the Hippodrome circus, the zoo and visits from sea shanty singers. These experiences help pupils to make sense of their classroom learning experiences.

Parents have mixed views of the school. Thy are worried about changes to staffing and how this might affect their child `s learning.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. However, some subject leaders have not been able to check how well the curriculum is being taught. Work to improve the quality of education has been set back by changes to staffing and absence.

In some subjects, such as mathematics, teachers have strong subject knowledge. Learning is broken down into small steps of what pupils need to learn and is regularly recapped. In other areas of the curriculum, leaders' intended curriculum is not being implemented as effectively. Pupils are not always clear about what they are learning. This means that some teaching does not help pupils to understand and remember new content. Staff have not received the training they require to be able to deliver some aspects of the curriculum as leaders intend.

The reading curriculum is systematically delivered so pupils achieve well from their starting points. In early years, children learn the sounds that letters make. This helps them to begin to successfully read words. The books that they use for practice are well matched to the sounds they are learning. Most pupils enjoy reading. However, a small number of pupils have fallen behind with their reading. Leaders know that some pupils need additional support, but this is not in place. Therefore, there are pupils who continue to struggle to read.

The curriculum design in the early years is a strength of the school. Children are immersed in interesting and engaging learning experiences. This helps children to practise and remember what they have been taught. For example, staff planned for children to learn how to handle and care for some baby guinea pigs. Staff used this opportunity to teach children how to be gentle and about the lifecycle of animals.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are accurately identified. However, the support given to these pupils is not suitably considered to meet their needs. As a result, even though the majority of pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as their peers, these pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Leaders have recently introduced a new behaviour policy. This has had a positive impact for the majority of pupils. Pupils consider it to be fair. However, the current behaviour sanctions are not improving the behaviour for pupils with more challenging behaviour. As a result, a significant minority of pupils experience regular suspensions and are more likely to be at risk of being placed on part-time timetables. This impacts upon these pupils achieving well.

Leaders have designed a calendar of opportunities to widen pupils' experiences, and which also have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. For example, 'Poplars 60 things to do' which includes pupils putting on shows at the local theatre. Opportunities like this inspire pupils to confidently perform and share their successes.

Recent leadership and staff changes have unsettled staff and parents. It has also affected the development of the curriculum due to the lack of checking to inform improvements.

As a result, pupils are not receiving the quality of education that leaders would like. Trustees are aware of these factors and have acted promptly to address these concerns. Further changes are planned to strengthen the capacity of leadership in school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have prioritised pupils' safety and wellbeing. Staff are trained to notice and report the signs of harm. Concerns are recorded and followed up promptly. Leaders work closely with external agencies. They are tenacious about securing additional support if they are concerned about the welfare and safety of a pupil.

Pupils are taught how to keep safe, including when online. They know who to talk to if they have concerns.

Staff and parents agree that pupils are safe in school.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Leaders have not fully checked that the curriculum they intend is being effectively implemented from early years to Year 6, including for those pupils with SEND. There are inconsistencies in the content and the delivery of the curriculum throughout the school. As a result, pupils do not achieve consistently well. Leaders should monitor and review the curriculum, while training staff how to teach the curriculum consistently well across all subjects.
- The weakest readers are not receiving the support they need to catch up. As a result, too many pupils are still at an early stage of reading. Leaders must ensure that pupils who are yet to learn to read are given well matched extra sessions that address the gaps in phonics knowledge that have been identified. Leaders should ensure that this support is rigorously monitored so that pupils catch up quickly.
- The implementation of the new behaviour policy is not having a positive impact on the pupils with the most challenging behaviour. As a result, pupils miss out on learning because of the repeated use of sanctions. Leaders must review the behaviour policy. They need to make changes to ensure it sets out realistic expectations taking into account the needs of pupils and subsequently leads to less suspensions and improved behaviour throughout the school.

## 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, Poplar Community Primary School to be good on September 2017.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	145541
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	10227580
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	395
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Drew Whitehead
<b>Headteacher</b>	Steven McLean
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.poplars.suffolk.sch.uk">www.poplars.suffolk.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school has been part of the Evolution Academies Trust since March 2018.
- The school admit nursery children from the age of three on a full-time and part-time basis.
- The school has had recent changes to senior leadership since April 2022.
- Since September 2021 there has been a significant turnover of staff. 12 members of staff have left, and 11 further members of staff have resigned or are taking redundancy to leave in August 2022. There are two vacancies for September 2022.
- The school currently uses one registered alternative provider.
- The school provides a breakfast and after school club for the pupils that attend the school.

## Information about this inspection

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

- The inspector met with the director of education for the trust, the interim deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the special educational needs and/or disabilities co-ordinator (SENDSCO) and the chief executive officer for the trust. The inspector also met with the chair of the trustees and the chair of the transition board.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum 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 a sample of pupils' work.
- The inspector spoke to parents when pupils were being dropped off at school. The inspector spoke to pupils in the playground and in the lunch hall.
- To inspect safeguarding the inspector checked the school's single central register, considered the safeguarding policy and spoke to staff and pupils. The inspector looked at case files and discussed a range of safeguarding records with the designated safeguarding leads.
- Other documentation was reviewed including minutes of transition board meetings, visit reports by the director of education and external reviews.
- The inspector considered 61 responses to Ofsted 's online survey, Parent View and 61 free-text responses submitted during the inspection. The inspector reviewed 36 responses to the online staff survey. There were no responses to the online pupil survey.

## **Inspection team**

Isabel Davis, lead inspector

Her Majesty 's Inspector

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