

Inspection of a good school: Southmoor Academy

Ryhope Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7TF

Inspection dates:

27 and 28 September 2022

Outcome

Southmoor Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders at Southmoor Academy have created a welcoming culture with high ambition for the pupils. Between pupils and staff there is a shared understanding of the basic expectations to be ready, respectful and safe. A strong careers programme supports a broad curriculum, enabling pupils have a range of options open to them when they leave school.

Pupils and teachers get along very well at Southmoor Academy. The good relationships help lessons to proceed effectively and support pupils to feel safe. Behaviour in the school is positive. Although there is some bullying, most pupils believe teachers deal with it effectively. Inspectors agree with this. Pupils speak very positively about the work of staff to support their mental health and well-being.

Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to be involved in activities beyond the classroom. These include the school production, Duke of Edinburgh's award, rookie lifeguards and the National Citizenship Service. Pupils engage in these activities in large numbers and they benefit from the additional skills and experiences they develop.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum which helps pupils to learn a broad range of subjects at key stage 3. The curriculum is well considered and supports pupils through to GCSE and into the sixth form. In some subjects, such as Religious Education in key stage 3, the curriculum is new. The range of subjects available to pupils at both GCSE and A level is broad and allows them to pursue their talents and interests.

Pupils at GCSE are encouraged to continue to study a range of academic subjects. Alongside strong careers guidance, this curriculum supports many pupils to join the sixth form and to move on to further study and training elsewhere. In developing the curriculum, leaders have considered the local labour market and developing pathways to higher education.

Teachers explain ideas in lessons clearly. Time is set aside in lessons to check that pupils remember what they learned previously, so that they understand the next topic. Teachers check pupils' understanding in a number of ways. This means that teachers are able to identify pupils' misconceptions and put them right.

Reading is a priority through the whole curriculum. All subjects include 'smart reading' tasks. These tasks are effective in improving pupils' general reading and comprehension. They also support the understanding of subject-specific vocabulary. In addition, leaders have clear methods of identifying the weakest readers. Trained staff give additional support to pupils who need help to improve their reading. This is supporting those pupils to develop their reading fluency and comprehension.

Teachers have had additional training on how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This focus on pupils with SEND is relatively recent, but it is having a positive effect. Teachers consider carefully how pupils with SEND will receive support. For example, in the approach taken in subjects to develop reading, and in the way that learning is broken down into manageable steps. Teachers use individual pupil support plans to understand pupils' needs.

Behaviour in school is positive. During lesson visits, teachers rarely have to use the school behaviour policy. This is because there is very little low-level disruption. This means that teachers can teach uninterrupted. Some pupils who do not meet the expectations of the school spend some time learning in 'The Bridge'. This provision supports some pupils to be more successful in school.

The majority of pupils attend school regularly, including those in the sixth form. However, a significant minority of pupils have poor attendance. The school uses a range of strategies to promote good attendance and there is a dedicated attendance team. Attendance is improving, but some pupils are absent from school too much. Leaders recognise the need to ensure these pupils are attending regularly to benefit from what the school has to offer.

Personal development at Southmoor is a timetabled subject delivered by a small team of teachers. These teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver this curriculum well. The effective personal development curriculum extends into the sixth form. Pupils talk confidently about what they learn in personal development lessons, for example challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusion. To support the personal development programme the school links effectively with outside agencies such as mental health charities, the NHS and local faith leaders.

Careers education and guidance are a strength of the school. Pupils know what choices are available to them when they leave school. An annual careers fair brings in over 50 employers, and the school is making the most of links with universities. Very few pupils leave school, at age 16 or 18, without a clear destination.

Staff enjoy working at the school and they are proud to work here. There is a strong sense of teamwork. Staff recognise the efforts that leaders have made to manage workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff training for safeguarding is well planned and thorough. Adults in school understand the community and the local risks which young people might face. Pupils who may need support are quickly identified. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to safeguard pupils. This means that the school has a strong culture of safeguarding.

Relationships between staff and pupils at the school are strong. Consequently, pupils feel confident that they have a trusted adult that they can speak to. Lessons in personal development support pupils to be knowledgeable about the risks that they face. In these lessons, they are comfortable discussing difficult topics with their teachers.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The attendance of some pupils is not high enough. As a result, these pupils are falling behind in their learning and not benefiting from the opportunities that the school offers. Leaders should continue to work with these pupils and their parents to improve their attendance and engagement with 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 an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 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.

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	138103
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10240470
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	1485
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	237
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Dr John Brown
Headteacher	Joanne Maw
Website	www.southmoorschool.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	15 November 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is one of two schools in Aspire North East Multi Academy Trust.
- The school has a small number of pupils who access registered alternative provision at The Beacon of Light and The Link School.
- The headteacher has been in post since September 2021.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This requires schools to provide information to pupils about apprenticeships and technical education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator, curriculum leaders and teachers. Meetings took place with leaders responsible for safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, careers and personal development.
- Meetings were held with members of the board of trustees, along with reviewing minutes from their meetings.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, history and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, met with pupils to discuss their work, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead. The single central record was checked. Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding records.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation provided by the school. This included school policies, curriculum plans, school self-evaluation and the development plan.
- Inspectors considered the view of parents in Ofsted's Parent View survey. There were 370 responses to this survey. Inspectors also considered the views of 76 staff and 469 pupils who responded to Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Carl Sugden, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Angela White	Ofsted Inspector
Kieran McGrane	Ofsted Inspector

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