

# Inspection of Spires Academy

Bredlands Lane, Sturry, Canterbury, Kent CT2 0HD

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Inspection dates: 10 and 11 January 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Good**

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The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Good

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

Pupils recognise that leaders have raised expectations of how pupils conduct themselves in school. They feel safe because the school rules make clear how pupils should behave and treat one another with respect. If bullying does happen, pupils trust staff to help them resolve any conflicts. If pupils do not follow the school rules, staff help them to understand how their behaviour impacts on others. Consequently, pupils say that behaviour has very much improved over time and their learning is now rarely disrupted.

Assemblies teach pupils the important values of 'respect, responsibility and resilience', which are key to being a 'Spires pupil'. Pupils are proud to provide support to visiting pupils from other countries as a 'buddy'. They are keen to share their experiences of education in contrast to the rest of the world. Pupils are clear that their school is a place to learn well.

While pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy, not all pupils receive the education they need about relationships and sex education, as well as valuable guidance around future careers. This means that not all pupils in Years 10 and 11 feel well prepared for the next stage in their education and life. Leaders know this and are already implementing clear plans to strengthen this support.

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

Leaders from the multi-academy trust recognise how frequent changes to leadership have had a negative impact on pupils' learning, behaviour and attendance. The newly appointed headteacher and leadership team have rapidly brought a clear vision and stability to the school. Shared strategic plans make sure all staff understand their role and responsibilities. Staff feel well supported by leaders and the multi-academy trust. The trust and the local advisory board of governors regularly check that leaders are taking effective steps to implement positive change.

Leaders know that pupils have not achieved as well as they could in the past, as reflected in the key stage 4 outcomes. Consequently, they have made significant changes to every subject across the curriculum to ensure it is much more ambitious. Leaders have ordered important knowledge in a logical way to help pupils connect ideas together. In most subjects, teachers use assessment well to identify and close gaps in pupils' knowledge. Pupils are rapidly catching up and making progress through the curriculum. For example, in English, pupils build an impressive linguistic vocabulary. This is used to contrast themes within the ambitious texts that leaders have selected to study. In addition, provision for pupils who find it difficult to read is well planned and delivered. However, there is still some variability in how well all teachers are delivering the intended curriculum. As a result, not all pupils learn as well as they could. Leaders know this and are taking action by providing staff with training and coaching.

Leaders have been swift to improve the culture of behaviour in the school. Lessons are calm and orderly because teachers quickly resolve low-level disruption. When pupils struggle to follow the rules, they receive effective support. This includes visits to the school 'Eden Room' to talk about their frustrations around learning. Leaders arrange counselling and, where needed, external specialist support if pupils struggle to manage their mental health.

New leadership has strengthened the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Every pupil with SEND has a tailored support plan. Staff use these well to adapt learning to meet pupils' needs. Where needed, leaders quickly ensure pupils get additional effective support to help them engage well with education.

Leaders have made attendance a priority for the school. The larger pastoral team has increased capacity to provide pupils with help to overcome barriers to attending school well. Leaders arrange for therapeutic help or alternative provision to help pupils engage with education. Although attendance is starting to show improvement, leaders are resolute in continuing to implement and monitor their plans to ensure pupils attend regularly.

Leaders have clear plans in place to enrich the personal development and talents of all pupils. A number of pupils in key stage 3 are proud to be members of the sports academy, where they can represent the school in local tournaments. Through the key stage 3 ethics curriculum, pupils learn to debate opposing views about ethical dilemmas. However, leaders' strong intentions for pupils in key stage 4 are not currently being fully realised. These pupils experience a disjointed series of assemblies and lessons. This means that pupils' age-appropriate understanding of issues such as sexual health or the law, lacks coherency. Leaders are acutely aware of this and have strengthened links with the local colleges to provide visits from guest speakers, to inform pupils of the wide offer of apprenticeships and courses available. However, leaders recognise that all aspects of the careers programme are not yet well implemented. Consequently, pupils lack understanding about preparing for the world of work.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding in school. All staff receive regular training so they know how to identify and report the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Detailed records illustrate the swift action that leaders take to keep pupils safe. When needed, leaders draw upon expert support from agencies such as the police and children's services. They also seek external speakers to work with pupils who are vulnerable to risks outside of school. This ensures that these pupils are knowledgeable of how to avoid dangers such as knife crime.

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

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

- The curriculum is not yet consistently implemented as leaders intend by all teachers, within all subjects. This means that there is variability in how well pupils are able to build on prior learning to achieve as well as they could. Leaders should continue to ensure that all staff gain the expertise they need to precisely identify and close the gaps in pupils' learning.
- Not all pupils attend school as regularly as they should. This means that they are at risk of falling behind in their education. Leaders must continue to embed their extended plans to improve attendance and re-engage pupils back into education.
- The personal development curriculum is not yet fully implemented. As a result, not all pupils are as well informed about sex and relationships or confident when making decisions about careers. Leaders must ensure that they realise their comprehensive plans to enrich pupils' personal development, so that all pupils feel well prepared for life.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135305
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10241858
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	695
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	James Toop
<b>Headteacher</b>	Anna Burden
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.spiresacademy.com">www.spiresacademy.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	17 to 18 May 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- There have been recent changes in the senior leadership of the school over the past three years. The current headteacher and deputy headteacher started their roles in June 2022.
- The school is part of the Education for the 21st Century multi-academy trust.
- The school no longer operates a sixth-form provision for pupils aged 16 to 18.
- The school uses two registered and one unregistered alternative providers to provide education for a small number of pupils.
- 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 educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded 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.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history and music. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at planning in other subjects.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of trustees, the chief executive officer and the chair of the local advisory board. Inspectors also met with other leaders from the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors considered the 80 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including 59 free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff and pupil surveys, and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors viewed the school's website and policies, met with the designated safeguarding leads, spoke with pupils and staff, checked school records of safeguarding checks carried out on adults working at the school, and spoke with trustees and the chair of the local advisory board.

## Inspection team

Michelle Lower, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Rupert Prutton	Ofsted Inspector
Nicky Archer	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Cooksey	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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