

Inspection of Ernulf Academy

Barford Road, St. Neots PE19 2SH

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 January 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils share largely positive relationships with staff and their peers. Teachers care about pupils. Pupils' work and examination results show that they are starting to achieve more successfully. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have not benefitted as much as others from leaders' improved approaches to the quality of education.

Many pupils behave well and are keen to learn. However, in some lessons, their learning is interrupted by some pupils' poor behaviour. Some teachers do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently. Pupils said that this results in the actions of some teachers being unfair and not effective.

Pupils value staff's willingness to help when they have concerns. Bullying sometimes happens, but staff put measures in place to make it stop. At times, these measures are not completely effective in reducing the tension in pupils' relationships. Some pupils also receive homophobic comments.

Pupils appreciate the increased number of staff supervising them during breaktimes. This helps pupils to feel safe. Pupils enjoy time together in the various social spaces, the well-resourced library and the learning support centre. Some pupils take on positions of responsibility during lunchtime, such as working in the pupil-led tuck shop.

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

Leaders have redesigned the curriculum to be ambitious for all pupils. Leaders have made clear to staff in most subjects what knowledge should be taught and the order in which to teach it. In some subjects, leaders have not completely clarified what pupils must know or be able to do. This is particularly challenging in subjects taught by teachers with less well-developed subject knowledge - for example, supply teachers or unqualified staff, who need greater clarity and support to know exactly what to teach.

In many subjects, teachers deliver the curriculum successfully to meet the needs of most pupils. However, the curriculum in some subjects is not delivered as effectively. Some teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the subject and how to teach it well. Where this is the case, teachers do not choose the most effective learning activities and resources. This does not support pupils, particularly those with SEND, to learn successfully over time.

Leaders do not routinely provide suitable help for pupils who have fallen behind in reading. Teachers do not always understand how to plan and teach early reading effectively. For example, teachers regularly expect these pupils to learn from texts when pupils do not have sufficient knowledge or skills to read them confidently and accurately.

At the beginning of this academic year, senior leaders introduced new approaches to improve pupils' behaviour. Staff appreciate these changes, which has resulted in pupils demonstrating more positive behaviour. In many lessons, pupils learn in a calm and purposeful atmosphere. However, some lessons are disrupted due to some teachers' inconsistent use of leaders' agreed behaviour policy and systems.

The attendance of pupils, particularly those with SEND, is too low. Leaders' measures to improve attendance show some signs of success. Over the past year, the number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced. However, leaders acknowledge that this is an area they should continue to focus on.

Leaders have recently introduced a well-planned programme to support pupils to learn about themselves and the wider world. This programme includes teaching pupils about different beliefs and lifestyles. However, the programme has not been as successful as leaders planned. There remain some pupils who do not understand the importance of tolerance for the differences and beliefs of others. Some parents and pupils are rightly concerned about the regular use of homophobic language by some pupils.

Leaders have put in place careers education and advice that meets the requirements of the provider access legislation. However, not all pupils have accessed this programme. Some pupils, including those with SEND, have not met careers advisors prior to making important career decisions. Some pupils with SEND find it difficult to get the information they need. This means they are not well placed to make informed decisions about their next steps in employment, education or training.

The school has experienced many changes in leadership this year. Supported by the trust, school leaders have acted swiftly to make necessary changes to improve the school. Staff have confidence in the leadership team. Staff enjoy working at the school.

Many parents contributed towards Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Most expressed frustration with aspects of the school's work. Leaders know they have further work to do to reassure parents about the positive impact of the changes they are making.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide regular training for staff so that they are alert to signs of potential harm. Leaders and staff act swiftly and appropriately when concerns arise.

Leaders work well with external agencies and ensure that vulnerable pupils get the support they need.

Trust leaders and governors ensure that school leaders carry out the expected background checks to ensure that adults at the school are suitable.

Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe and know how to respond when worried about their well-being.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not clarified exactly what pupils must know and be able to do in all subjects. As a result, teachers with underdeveloped subject knowledge or supply teachers do not teach the knowledge pupils must learn. Leaders must outline and provide support for teachers so they know exactly what must be taught in all subjects.
- Leaders do not have a cohesive approach to support pupils who find reading challenging. These pupils are often required to learn from texts that they cannot read. Leaders must create an effective, systematic approach to help pupils who find reading difficult.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils with SEND receive the academic and personal support they need. This has resulted in these pupils not learning the curriculum as well as they should. Many pupils with SEND have not been able to make well-informed decisions about their next steps in education, employment or training. Leaders must put measures in place so that pupils with SEND receive the necessary academic and personal support to be successful.
- Staff do not consistently follow leaders' behaviour policy and systems. Pupils experience disruptions to learning in too many lessons. Leaders must ensure all staff apply the behaviour policy consistently and as expected.
- Leaders' approach to improving attendance is not working well enough. Pupils' attendance remains too low. Leaders need to develop more effective ways of improving attendance.
- Leaders' programme for personal development has not supported some pupils well enough so that they show respect for people's differences. Some pupils use homophobic language at school. Leaders need to ensure that pupils learn the importance of respecting the different lifestyles in society.

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	146369
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10254986
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	705
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ben Brown
Principal	Mark Neesam
Website	www.astreaernulf.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- There are many new leaders at the school. The principal started in September 2022. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) started in January 2023. The principal, the SENCo and other members of the leadership team are new to their posts this academic year.
- The school uses four registered alternative providers and one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, history, art and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also visited lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors spoke with leaders and staff about safeguarding policies and practices. Inspectors looked at the register of background checks for adults working at the school. Inspectors also looked at child protection files.
- Inspectors considered the 162 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, and the 150 free-text responses from parents. Inspectors also considered the 55 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey and the 41 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.

Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Caroline Dawes	Ofsted Inspector
Jim McAtear	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Gray	Ofsted Inspector

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