

Inspection of Colchester Academy

Hawthorn Avenue, Colchester, Essex CO4 3JL

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 March 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Colchester Academy is a friendly and inclusive school. Pupils are happy and are safe. The majority of pupils meet the high expectations that leaders set. There is a supportive and caring culture in the school. Pupils appreciate the relationships that they develop with staff. Pupils learn to respect one another.

Pupils benefit from a broad and ambitious curriculum. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils particularly enjoy studying Spanish, following leaders' development of the curriculum. In addition to learning a language, this helps pupils to develop their cultural capital.

The school is generally calm and purposeful. On occasions, there is disruption to lessons by a small number of pupils who do not behave well. Teachers address poor behaviour consistently. Bullying occasionally takes place. Pupils are largely confident that when it does happen, leaders deal with it straight away. Pupils support others as anti-bullying ambassadors.

Year 10 pupils enjoy developing their communication skills through taking part in the 'Jack Petchey' challenge. Pupils deliver speeches linked to their own beliefs and interests to younger year groups in assemblies. Topics include awareness of mental health, ambition, and developing resilience in the context of learning to play a musical instrument.

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

From historically low starting points when pupils join the school in Year 7, pupils develop their knowledge and understanding through a broad and ambitious curriculum. Despite disappointing results, leaders have worked closely with colleagues from the South Suffolk Learning Trust to improve the school.

Until recently, pupils were entered into some GCSE examinations, such as English Literature, in Year 10. Leaders have reverted to a more traditional curriculum, which more closely meets the needs of pupils at the school. However, despite significant improvements to the curriculum, there is still a lagged effect in the published data. While the number of pupils who study the English Baccalaureate subjects remains low, this is increasing year on year. This is due to leaders' positive actions to increase significantly the number of pupils who choose to study a modern foreign language at GCSE.

Leaders prioritise reading. Generally, pupils join the school with lower-than-average reading ages. Pupils develop their reading skills through a range of planned reading sessions. Well-planned support helps pupils to catch up with their reading. These strategies are ensuring that all pupils develop their reading skills quickly so they can successfully access the rest of the curriculum.

When developing the new curriculum, leaders have carefully set out the important information that pupils will learn. In the main, teachers have secure subject knowledge. Consistent lesson structures and routines help pupils to know and remember what they need to. All lessons begin by recalling pupils' prior learning. This helps them remember more of what they have learned over time.

Teachers new to the profession or temporary are well supported to develop their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. However, on occasions, the information that teachers gather is not used precisely enough to plan and inform teaching well enough. This leads to gaps in learning. When this happens, pupils, including pupils with SEND, do not learn as well as they should.

Leaders accurately identify, assess and support pupils with SEND. In most lessons, teachers use the information about individual pupils to plan and adapt their teaching precisely. This provides pupils with SEND with the support they need to access the curriculum successfully, and consequently learn well.

Leaders monitor behaviour closely. Records demonstrate that behaviour is improving. Teachers follow the behaviour policy consistently and apply sanctions fairly. Attendance, and in particular persistent absence, is not yet where leaders want it to be. Too many pupils miss too much time from school. Leaders' determined and effective actions are improving attendance, particularly of the most disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils' wider development is supported effectively. Pupils have access to, and take part in, a wide range of extra-curricular activities. As well as trips and visits, pupils have access to a variety of employers and careers guidance. This prepares pupils well for the next steps in their education or employment.

Staff are extremely supportive of the leadership of the school. They feel that their workload is well considered.

Governors and trustees have a strong oversight of the school. They hold leaders to account through regular monitoring visits to the school, asking appropriate questions to find out if leaders' actions are making a difference. Support from the new trust is helping leaders to make noteworthy improvements to the school. This has significantly improved the quality of education in the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff receive up-to-date training. This helps staff to identify and know how to report safeguarding concerns. Leaders' systems for reporting concerns are appropriate. They respond to concerns in a timely and appropriate manner. Where necessary, they involve and work with external agencies effectively to ensure that pupils receive the appropriate support that they need. Leaders carry out and record all pre-employment checks.

The curriculum content in lessons and assemblies supports pupils to learn in an age-appropriate way how to keep themselves safe. They learn how to stay safe when online and understand the risks of drug use.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few instances, teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan the teaching that pupils need precisely. This includes for pupils with SEND. This is more common in lessons taught by less-experienced or temporary staff. As a result, a small number of pupils, including some pupils with SEND, develop gaps in their learning and do not build their knowledge well enough over time. Leaders must provide effective training to ensure that there is greater consistency in how teachers use information to plan and adapt their teaching precisely, to ensure that all pupils, including pupils with SEND, know and remember the important information that they need.
- Systems to monitor absence are used to support and challenge effectively parents whose children are frequently absent. However, persistent absence is still too high for some pupils. These pupils miss valuable learning. Leaders should continue to further refine and strengthen their approach to improving attendance, to ensure that pupils attend school more regularly.

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	136195
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10257055
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	909
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jonathan Waters
Principal	Jenny Betts
Website	www.colchesteracademy.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 December 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the school has become part of the South Suffolk Learning Trust.
- The principal has been in post since September 2018.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- A number of pupils attend alternative provision. The school uses three registered and seven unregistered alternative providers, which are all approved by the local authority.

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, history, music and Spanish. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons in other subjects on day two of the inspection.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, curriculum leaders, support staff, early career teachers, a representative of the local governing body and a number of trustees.
- Inspectors scrutinised the single central record. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and examined safeguarding records. Inspectors spoke to pupils and staff about safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke to alternative providers used by the school.
- The lead inspector considered the 133 responses and 59 free-text responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The lead inspector also reviewed the 65 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 83 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

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