

Inspection of a good school: Cobham Free School

Portsmouth Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 1TF

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 May 2023

Outcome

Cobham Free School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Cobham Free School serves pupils well. As the school has grown over time, leaders have remained true to the ethos they established from the outset: Optimum Omnibus – the best for all. They have established a safe and welcoming community, where aspirations and expectations are high. Pupils work well alongside each other, thriving academically while growing holistically as individuals.

The atmosphere around both school sites is warm and nurturing. Relationships between adults and pupils are well established and effective. On the lower school (infant) site, the youngest pupils work and play well together. Occasional, more boisterous behaviour on the playground is managed well, with pupils encouraged to make positive choices. Consistent routines and expectations help pupils to settle quickly when they 'move up' to the main school site. Here, key stage 2 and secondary-aged pupils exist harmoniously alongside sixth-form students. Classrooms and corridors on both sites are calm and purposeful.

Pupils report feeling well looked after. Leaders have established an open culture, which gives pupils the courage to 'call out' the occasional behaviours that make them uncomfortable. Concerns are taken seriously and acted on swiftly by adults. This helps pupils to feel safe and valued, trusting adults to manage any difficult situations well.

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

Standards and expectations have remained high as the school has grown and evolved. Leaders' vision for excellence has not been diluted as more pupils and staff have joined the school. Consequently, pupils do well, achieving strong academic outcomes throughout their time at the school. The increasing proportion staying for their sixth-form studies reflects the confidence that pupils have in the quality of education and support they experience.

Leaders' aspirations for the curriculum are uncompromising, right from the early years. Careful thought has been given to how learning builds over time and from phase to phase. Leaders in each phase are clear about the knowledge that pupils need to gain in each subject, and in what order. They reflect on what works well, adapting planning and resources to make pupils' learning even better. Primary and secondary teachers are beginning to learn from each other about how the curriculum can be taught to best effect across the whole of the school's age range. Staff are keen to develop their own knowledge and say that leaders act on their requests for relevant and useful extra training.

The school's curriculum strikes a careful balance between academic rigour, creativity and promoting pupils' well-being. Leaders' passion for the creative arts is evident in the range of opportunities available to pupils, particularly in music. An enrichment programme provides older pupils with access to a planned range of additional experiences, such as learning Greek, creative writing and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Leaders are mindful of providing pupils with encounters that they might otherwise not get to have, which develops their understanding of the diverse world they inhabit.

Leaders' recent work to develop the reading curriculum is paying dividends. Changes to how reading is taught are working well in Reception to Year 2, albeit with more to do to make teaching even more precise and consistent. Adults use questioning well to check pupils' understanding of the letters and sounds they are learning. Children in the early years learn useful vocabulary, which supports their future learning. Leaders use community events to promote reading with pupils and their parents. Pupils engage well with these activities, developing a thirst for reading and accessing a wide range of challenging texts. In Year 3 and beyond, support for weaker readers is appropriate, although not linked as well as it could be to the new approach being used in key stage 1. Adults put extra help in place, enabling older pupils to gain confidence and, over time, become better at reading.

A well-planned personal, social and health education programme extends through to the end of Year 13. It addresses relevant and sensitive issues, such as friendship, relationships, gender identity and toxic masculinity, in a thoughtful and timely way. In the sixth form, students learn about finances, diet and resilience as part of their preparation for leaving school and home. High-quality careers information, education, advice and guidance supports pupils in Years 7 to 13 to identify their career aspirations and hone their employability skills. Leaders aim to help pupils work out who they are and what they have to offer. The effectiveness of this work is seen in the high proportions of pupils sustaining high-quality education, employment and training when they leave school.

The proportion of pupils with an identified special educational need and/or disability (SEND) is high compared with other schools. Parents have confidence that adults in school will provide pupils with the extra help and support they need to succeed. Leaders of SEND within the school put their shared knowledge and expertise to good use. Their care and support for vulnerable pupils goes above and beyond what is required. This helps to remove potential barriers to learning for some pupils with particularly complex needs or circumstances. Where necessary, leaders work persistently with experts from

beyond the school to identify additional or alternative support that meets pupils' specific needs more precisely.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders go about their safeguarding work with diligence and rigour. They are attuned to the risks in their community and to the families who may be particularly vulnerable. Thorough training equips them well to take prompt and decisive action when concerns arise. Consequently, risks to pupils are minimised.

Staff know families well. They confidently report any behaviours that are out of the ordinary, recognising that these may be a symptom of a bigger issue. Pupils are similarly empowered to notice where they may need help and trust adults to act in their best interests.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some parts of the curriculum, such as the teaching of reading, are evolving. For these areas, there are variations in staff expertise and knowledge. As a result, some parts of the curriculum are not delivered quite as effectively as others. Leaders need to ensure that staff receive the specific training and support to enable them to deliver the full curriculum consistently well across all phases of 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 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 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.

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	138226
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10240516
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	840
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	77
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Howard Morris
Headteacher	Michaela Khatib (executive head)
Website	www.cobhamfreeschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 and 14 September 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a government-funded free school, providing education to pupils aged 4 to 18. It opened in September 2012 and has expanded its age range over time. The sixth-form provision opened in September 2019.
- Cobham Free School is governed by the Cobham Free School Trust. The chair of the trust is one of the founder members of the school and has been in post since the school's inception. The executive head is also a founder member of the school and has led the school since it opened.
- The school is based on two sites. The main site is purpose built and accommodates pupils from Year 3 upwards. Pupils in Reception and key stage 1 are based at a smaller site, known as the lower school site, which is close to the main site.
- A small number of pupils receive some or all of their education via an alternative provider. These providers are all registered with and inspected by Ofsted.

Information about this inspection

- 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 met with a range of senior and middle leaders throughout the inspection. They spoke to representatives of alternative providers used by the school. They also spoke to representatives from the academy trust board, which governs the school.
- Inspectors visited both school sites. They carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, geography and physical education. This involved meeting with leaders of those subjects, visiting a sample of lessons, talking to pupils and teachers and looking at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also met with the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator team.
- Arrangements for safeguarding were scrutinised. The lead inspector reviewed the school's central record of recruitment checks for adults working in the school. They met with the school's designated safeguarding team and sampled records of safeguarding concerns and actions taken. They spoke to staff, pupils and trustees about the school's work to keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors met with early career teachers and with groups of pupils. They took account of survey responses from 210 parents, 106 members of staff, and 117 pupils from the secondary phase of the school.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Carl McCarthy

His Majesty's Inspector

Helen Middleton

Ofsted Inspector

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