

Inspection of a good school: Esteem Valley Academy

Bennerley Avenue, Cotmanhay, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 8PF

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 June 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils get a fresh start at Esteem Valley Academy, particularly after previous difficulties in mainstream education. Many pupils study personalised programmes. They re-engage in their learning because they know staff care about how well they do. Pupils feel valued and learn that they can be successful.

Staff promote care, tolerance and respect. There is little or no bullying. Pupils said that staff were kind and they trusted them to deal with any concerns they have. Staff have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. They enjoy collecting their 'dojo' rewards. Pupils behave well and remain focused in lessons. Disruption to learning is rare, and teachers usually deal with this well if it happens. Leaders do not tolerate any derogatory language. There are clear routines that help pupils behave well.

Leaders provide breakfast for pupils each morning. Many pupils spend breaktime and lunchtime in conversation with staff. As a result, pupils feel safe and get on well with each other. Pupils improve their behaviour over time.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities within the wider curriculum such as the recent visit from 'Zoolab', visiting the Holocaust Museum and listening to inspirational speakers from the world of sport.

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

Leaders have recently made improvements to some areas of the curriculum. They have also addressed the historically poor behaviour of some pupils. As a result, there is now a calm, happy environment across the primary and secondary sites.

Many of the pupils on roll have been permanently excluded or have missed significant

time in formal education. Leaders assess pupils as soon as they join the school. Teachers then plan individually for each pupil, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This includes teaching knowledge to backfill gaps or continuing with a curriculum that prepares pupils for when they return to a mainstream school. Small class sizes offer targeted support. Leaders make deliberate choices about the alternative provision they use to support the school's offer. They have ensured that there is a wide range of accreditation opportunities for pupils. These meet pupils' needs and future career aspirations.

In lessons, teachers plan work that is well matched to each pupil's ability. In the main, teachers plan appropriately challenging and creative learning opportunities. However, leaders have not yet defined the detailed knowledge that pupils need to know in all subjects. This means staff do not always plan activities that will enable pupils to know and remember more of the curriculum.

Leaders have not ensured that staff have all the information they need to support pupils with SEND. Where pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), leaders do not always break down the information into precise targets which are then shared fully with staff. Leaders sometimes miss opportunities for identifying any additional SEND that pupils may have during induction, especially sensory needs. Consequently, the progress of these pupils is not as strong as it could be.

Leaders prioritise reading. Staff assess pupils' reading ability as soon as they join the school. Early readers learn phonics in a systematic way. However, not all staff teach letter sounds precisely. As a result, a few pupils struggle to read with fluency.

Leaders promote pupils' broader development well. Leaders have planned personal, social and health education to be responsive to current issues. Staff teach pupils about risk and how to stay safe, for example when using social media. Staff teach pupils about building positive relationships and the concept of consent. Pupils enjoyed the recent magistrate day experience.

Leaders have developed a careers programme which includes a personalised approach for each pupil. This develops pupils' knowledge and skills relating to their career ambitions. Leaders work with pupils, parents and specialist providers to plan a smooth transition for when pupils leave this school.

Governance of the school is a strength. Knowledgeable governors and trustees hold leaders to account well. They have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. School leaders, trust leaders and governors share the same vision for pupils. They work effectively as a team to bring about school improvement. Leaders support staff with their workload and well-being. Staff enjoy working at the school and feel proud to do so.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding leads and pastoral staff know pupils well. They work closely with parents and other agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and well. Staff understand the risks pupils face in the local area. When required, the school acts promptly in making safeguarding referrals. Leaders maintain clear and detailed safeguarding records.

Staff are well trained and know how to recognise when a pupil may be at risk of harm. Pupils are supported to recognise these risks for themselves. Pupils learn to keep themselves safe when online and when in the wider community. Pupils learn about county lines and have recently completed a knife crime project with the police.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some subjects in the curriculum are not yet well planned and sequenced. Curriculum plans for these subjects do not clearly identify the key knowledge that pupils must acquire or the order in which it should be taught. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they could in these subjects. Leaders need to ensure that curriculum plans in these subjects clearly set out in a logical order the key knowledge that pupils must learn. Leaders should also make sure that staff receive training to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to teach all areas of the curriculum effectively. This will help pupils to know more and remember more.
- Leaders have adopted a systematic phonics programme suitable for younger early readers. However, the match between the books and the sounds pupils know is not always consistent. Not all staff teach or use letter sounds precisely. As a result, some pupils struggle to read with fluency. Leaders should ensure that appropriate phonics programmes are in place for all key stages, which are implemented and monitored effectively so that all pupils develop as confident, fluent readers.
- Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who have social, emotional and mental health needs are well supported at the school. However, some pupils with additional needs, such as sensory needs, are not as well supported as they could be. Leaders do not always translate information on pupils' EHC plans well enough or consider unmet needs carefully enough. Consequently, some pupils' needs may go unmet, and the progress of these pupils is not as strong as it could be. Leaders need to break down the information on pupils' EHC plans into precise targets which are then shared fully with staff and carefully monitored. Leaders should also more carefully consider unmet needs during the induction process so that all needs are clearly identified and met.

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 predecessor school, Amber Valley and Erewash Support Centre, to be good in November 2018.

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	146055
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10269270
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	126
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Emly
Headteacher	Kevin Wildrianne
Website	www.avesc.derbyshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Esteem Valley Academy caters for pupils who have been permanently excluded or who are at risk of being excluded. The school operates on three sites. The Bennerley site caters for primary-age pupils in key stage 2 and secondary-age pupils in key stage 3. The Sawley Site provides education for key stage 4 pupils. In addition, the Alternative Provision Team provides bespoke education pathways and operates through the Kirk Hallam Site.
- The school is part of the Esteem Multi-Academy Trust, which it joined in 2018. When the predecessor school, Amber Valley and Erewash Support Centre, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- A new headteacher was appointed in January 2023.
- Pupils arrive throughout the year through referral from the local authority, usually as the result of permanent exclusion from a mainstream school. There is a mix of pupils on single and dual registration placements.
- All pupils have some specific need associated with past schooling or personal circumstances. Most have social, emotional or mental health needs. The majority of pupils have SEND.
- The school uses 20 unregistered alternative provision providers.

- 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.

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 and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors did deep dives into the following subjects: early reading, English, mathematics and art. Inspectors met with senior and subject leaders and with teachers and pupils. They visited lessons on several sites, scrutinised pupils' work and talked to pupils. Inspectors reviewed some subject planning and spoke to leaders about other subjects. The lead inspector listened to some pupils read.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors, the chair of trustees, trust leaders, including the chief executive officer and members of the trust expert (school improvement) team.
- The lead inspector gathered the view of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, information relating to attendance and behaviour, information on the school website, the curriculum and governance information.
- To inspect safeguarding arrangements, the inspectors spoke to the designated safeguarding lead, spoke to staff and pupils, reviewed the school's arrangements for checking the suitability of staff to work with children, and analysed leaders' procedures to check the suitability of alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors also considered the responses to the staff survey.
- While some parents completed Ofsted's questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, there were too few responses on this occasion to generate a report for inspectors to consider.

Inspection team

Anne Maingay, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Caroline Barton

Ofsted Inspector

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