

Inspection of a good school: The Ongar Academy

Fyfield Road, Ongar, Essex CM5 0AN

Inspection dates:

31 October and 1 November 2023

Outcome

The Ongar Academy continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Carl Wakefield. This school is part of the Bridge Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Mark Farmer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Keith Mogford.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending The Ongar Academy. They feel increasingly positive about the school after an unsettled period. They appreciate the high expectations the school now has of behaviour. Pupils are polite, tolerant, and respectful towards each other. Most pupils behave well.

The school provides a high level of individual support for pupils who need it. Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. This enables pupils who find school difficult to feel more confident and able to successfully focus on their learning. Pupils increasingly attend well.

Pupils develop their confidence through a range of leadership opportunities and clubs. Pupils are elected to leadership positions by their peers. They can participate in experiences that prepare them for adulthood, such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. There are many clubs, including drama and art. Girls and boys participate enthusiastically in a range of sports clubs. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are enhanced by well-planned visits, including to a local castle and zoo.

The school is determined that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do well. Pupils follow a curriculum that is increasingly well adapted to meet the needs of all pupils so that they can achieve well.

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

The school's curriculum is well thought out. It clearly identifies what pupils need to learn and how it will build their knowledge over time. Subject leaders accurately check what

pupils know. Leaders use this information to identify what pupils need to learn next. The school is adjusting the curriculum to ensure that any gaps in knowledge are addressed so that pupils do not fall behind.

Teachers question pupils effectively to check pupils' knowledge. Where it is appropriate, they provide opportunities for pupils to work independently and to discuss their ideas with each other. This develops pupils' communication skills and builds their knowledge. Pupils receive clear feedback on their work and use it to make improvements. As a result, pupils achieve well.

Pupils read often. They are expected to 'drop everything and read'. The reading curriculum teaches pupils to read well. However, due to staffing changes, there has been a delay in the school completing precise enough checks on how well pupils are able to read. This means that, for the few pupils who struggle to learn to read, they are not catching up as quickly as leaders would expect. The school is aware of this and has a secure plan in place to ensure checks are made on those pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read.

Teachers know the needs of pupils with SEND well and adapt their teaching to support them. Pupils with SEND are expected to take part in lessons, and support is given to ensure that they can do this successfully. As a result, pupils with SEND successfully access the same curriculum as their peers.

The school has focused on improving attitudes to learning through its chosen approach of 'discipline with dignity'. Through this, pupils learn the value of politeness and treating each other with respect. There are clear, well-understood expectations of how pupils should behave. The vast majority behave well. On the occasions when some pupils do not meet expectations, they are provided with support that helps them to improve their behaviour.

The school has a well-considered personal, social and health education curriculum. This teaches pupils about topics such as healthy relationships, consent, managing risk and online safety. Assemblies cover important issues and events, such as Black History Month. Pupils learn about the importance of treating people who are different to them with respect. As a result, pupils say that this is a school where it is safe and normal to be different.

Pupils learn about a range of future opportunities. They meet employers and college representatives at a careers fair. Guidance meetings support pupils to make appropriate choices about their next steps. However, the development of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is at an early stage. For example, pupils do not have enough work experience opportunities or information on higher education.

Staff at The Ongar Academy are positive about the support they receive for their workload and training from the trust. This is developing their knowledge and skills.

Governors are active in checking that the school is making the progress that it should. They have successfully supported the school to improve communications and build

relationships with parents. This has significantly increased the confidence of the local community in the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While the reading curriculum is effective, the school has not checked how well pupils learn to read. The few pupils who struggle to learn to read are not identified quickly enough. The school should ensure that the plans in place to provide weaker readers with the additional support they need are implemented swiftly.
- The school's CEIAG programme does not provide pupils with enough high-quality encounters with employers and higher education providers, or with opportunities to experience the world of work. This means that pupils are not aware of the opportunities ahead of them and how to access these. The school should ensure that its CEIAG programme is developed and implemented, and its effectiveness evaluated fully, so that pupils build their knowledge and experience of the world of work.

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 May 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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	141947
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10310405
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	597
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Keith Mogford
CEO of the trust	Mark Farmer
Headteacher	Carl Wakefield
Website	www.theongaracademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All but two members of the school's senior leadership team, including the headteacher, joined the school in September 2023.
- Over 80% of the teaching staff joined the school in September 2023.
- The school offered sixth-form provision until July 2023.
- The school uses six registered alternative provisions for pupils.
- The school is a member of the Bridge Academy Trust.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO of the trust, as well as with members of the local governing body. He also spoke to the local authority school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, languages, and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited a range of lessons.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors held meetings with a range of leaders, including the careers coordinator, and the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator.
- The lead inspector met with the early career teacher and staff involved in the induction of new teachers.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times around school. They met with groups of pupils to discuss behaviour in the school.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The lead inspector considered the 93 responses and 64 free-text responses received during the inspection to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. He also considered the 37 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Steve Woodley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Suzanne Thrower

Ofsted Inspector

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