

Inspection of Plume School

Fambridge Road, Maldon, Essex CM9 6AB

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 November 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The joint headteachers of this school are Ruth Clark and Tom Baster. This school is the sole member of the Plume School Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tim Bailey.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend Plume School. They appreciate the support they receive from staff, particularly around their well-being. The school celebrates the diversity of its pupils. As a result, they are tolerant and broad-minded.

Pupils get on very well with each other; they treat each other and adults with respect. They are polite and kind. Pupils are increasingly resilient and independent. Staff have high expectations of pupils. Most pupils meet them; they behave very well. When a small minority do not, the school provides them with support to improve.

The school offers a wide range of clubs, including sports and performing arts. Pupils learn how to be good citizens by raising money for local charities. Lead students promote environmental issues. There are many trips and visits, both locally and overseas. These increase pupils' interest in the curriculum and broaden their horizons.

Pupils follow a broad curriculum that prepares them well for adulthood. They learn about different careers and gain the information they need to make informed choices at key points. Students in the sixth form build on the knowledge and skills they acquire in the main school, and as a result they achieve well.

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

The school has ensured that the curriculum is increasingly well-designed and delivered. As a result, pupils increasingly build a rich body of knowledge. Published outcomes for 2023 show that pupils in key stage 4 did not achieve as highly as they should. However, this was principally the result of high levels of persistent absence by some pupils, and some disruption to the delivery of aspects of the curriculum.

The school has identified the key knowledge that pupils need to succeed. The curriculum is carefully designed, so that pupils gain, and can build upon, this important knowledge securely. There are regular opportunities for pupils to revisit previous learning. In many subjects, pupils have well-designed opportunities to revisit and practise what they have learned. However, this is not consistently effective across all subjects. As a result, the depth of knowledge that pupils can recall varies.

The curriculum is ambitious and well-adapted for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school knows the needs of pupils well and checks how well they are doing. When necessary, staff use this information effectively to provide specific adaptations so that all pupils can fully participate and gain the knowledge they need.

Both the school and its pupils value reading highly. Pupils read often. They regularly 'drop everything and read'. Staff carry out checks to identify weaker readers swiftly. These pupils receive precise support. This enables them to become increasingly fluent and accurate readers, which in turn ensures pupils can access the rest of the curriculum.

Pupils on the Fambridge Road campus, in Years 9 to 13, conduct themselves with maturity and consideration for others. On the Mill Road campus, most pupils in Years 7 and 8 behave well. That said, some pupils do not always behave calmly around the building. As they come into lessons, they are, on occasion, slower to focus on their learning. This sometimes interrupts the learning of other pupils.

The school has a well-developed personal development curriculum. Pupils receive helpful guidance about different careers and routes to employment, such as apprenticeships. They learn important content about keeping themselves healthy and safe, for example online safety and the perils of gambling.

Students in the sixth form experience a high-quality curriculum that is well matched to their needs. Teachers build on their knowledge well. Students learn how to organise their time productively. They use their time out of lessons well to broaden their knowledge. As a result, they are prepared well for employment, training, and university. The comprehensive personal development curriculum teaches them about current affairs and, in the run-up to Christmas, the dangers of drink driving.

The school is well led and managed, it engages well with parents, such as through the parent forum. It has developed systems that are improving pupils' attendance. Trustees challenge and support school leaders well. Trustees check safeguarding in school. Staff, including early career teachers (ECTs) say that leaders are considerate of their well-being and provide them with the support and training they need.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, pupils do not have enough opportunities to revisit and practise important knowledge. Where this is the case, they do not recall their learning, including key subject vocabulary, as well as they could. The school needs to ensure that the revisiting of important knowledge, including the use of subject vocabulary, is consistently planned and delivered across all subjects.
- While most pupils behave well, some pupils, particularly on the Mill Road campus, are not always on their best behaviour around the building and when they come into lessons. This sometimes interrupts pupils' learning. The school should review

its systems and procedures to ensure pupils display positive behaviours for learning throughout the school.

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	137790
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10287115
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,744
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	261
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tim Bailey
Headteachers	Ruth Clark and Tom Baster
Website	http://www.plume.essex.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	16 and 17 January 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has been led by joint interim headteachers since September 2023.
- The school operates on two sites. Pupils in Year 7 and 8 attend the Mill Road campus and pupils in Years 9 to 13 attend the Fambridge Road campus.
- The school currently uses six registered and four unregistered alternative providers for pupils.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 members of the board of trustees. He also spoke to the local authority's school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, physical education, history, and science. 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 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.
- Inspectors met with ECTs 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.
- An inspector spoke with representatives from the alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The lead inspector considered the 258 responses and 197 free-text responses received during the inspection to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. He considered the 143 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 268 responses to the pupil survey. An inspector also spoke to a parent on the phone.

Inspection team

Steve Woodley, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
David Piercy	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Gray	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Sutton	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Whear	Ofsted Inspector
Liz Smith	His Majesty's Inspector

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