

Inspection of Poplars Community Primary School

St Margaret's Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4HN

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

The headteacher of this school is Gemma Hurren. This school is part of Evolution 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, Craig Avieson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Drew Whitehead.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending Poplars Community Primary School. They appreciate the improvements in the school and the increasing sense of community these have brought. After a period of change, pupils are happy and settled. They are ready and able to learn well.

Pupils know the clear expectations in place and respond positively to these. Pupils recognise the value of learning. However, gaps in their knowledge from the previously weaker curriculum mean some pupils are not able to access the high-quality curriculum that the school is working hard to put in place.

The school rules to be 'ready, respectful and safe' are lived out by pupils. They understand why it is important to treat everyone fairly. Pupils behave well. They value the rewards they receive for their conduct, their learning and for reading regularly.

Pupils are proud of the responsibilities they hold. These include being 'core value ambassadors' and play leaders. Pupils develop confidence and independence through these leadership positions. Pupils thrive on the opportunity to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities. These ensure they get a rich range of experiences that nurture and develop their wider interests, as well as complement and enrich what they have been learning.

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

Poplars Community Primary School is an improving school. The new school leadership team is working at pace to bring about the changes needed to set pupils up for success. While this work is ongoing, these changes are considered and ambitious.

Reading has rightly been prioritised across the whole school. Trained staff teach reading in a structured way across all year groups. This is monitored carefully by leaders. The books pupils read contain the sounds they know and need to practise. Teachers read to pupils daily, so pupils are exposed to high-quality texts and rich vocabulary. However, due to past weaknesses, a significant number of older pupils are not able to read fluently. The school makes sure these pupils receive intensive daily reading support. This is having an impact. However, some pupils remain significantly behind in what they know. Consequently, too many pupils leave the school lacking the reading ability they need for their future learning.

In some subjects, the curriculum has been recently revised and now sets out the knowledge that pupils should learn. Pupils have not had the chance to learn the planned content yet. This means their learning of key knowledge and skills is not consistently strong across different subjects. Furthermore, previous weaknesses in curriculum provision mean some pupils have gaps in their knowledge.

Clear systems to identify and support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are in place. Teachers make necessary adaptations to planning to help pupils with SEND to access and enjoy their learning. Trained staff use precise plans to support pupils with SEND. This means they can access an appropriate curriculum successfully alongside their peers.

Staff in early years know the children well and support them to develop new skills. A well-planned curriculum is taught from which children are immersed in learning. The learning environment is well resourced, and effective activities are planned to ensure the curriculum is delivered effectively. As a result, children achieve well and are being prepared for Year 1.

School leaders have implemented a clear behaviour policy. Staff use a consistent approach to managing behaviour across the school. This is working well. Expectations are high, and pupils meet these. Pupils thrive on the praise and rewards they receive for behaving well, which ensures that learning proceeds without disruption.

The school places a strong emphasis on fostering pupils' wider personal development. Pupils learn how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy, and they learn how to stay safe online.

Leaders recognise the importance of rich experiences beyond the academic. They have identified the opportunities they want pupils to experience at Poplars. These include visits, a careers event, and trips to places of worship. A range of additional experiences such as rock climbing is provided. Pupils thrive on the opportunity to take part in trust-wide competitions.

School leaders and governors have the necessary expertise to drive further development. Their actions are having a positive impact on pupils' experiences at the school. However, there is more work to do so that all pupils benefit from a good quality of education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A significant proportion of older pupils lack the required knowledge and understanding they need to read fluently. This means that they are not equipped to fully access new concepts and ideas in class. Leaders should ensure that pupils are supported to catch up quickly in reading so they are able to access the full curriculum and achieve well throughout all subject areas.

- In some subjects, the curriculum has been revised. Consequently, pupils have not had enough time to learn the intended knowledge and skills. The school needs to ensure that the wider curriculum is implemented consistently over time across all subjects. This will ensure that pupils securely learn the knowledge and skills they need.

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	145541
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10288560
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	303
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Drew Whitehead
Headteacher	Gemma Hurren
Website	www.poplars.suffolk.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 and 29 June 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, a new school leadership group has started working at this school. In addition to this, a significant number of new teachers have also taken up post.
- The school uses two registered providers of alternative provision.

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.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, staff, the chair of trustees, the chair of governors and the chief executive officer from the trust.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history, geography and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to pupils read with a familiar member of staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour logs, attendance records, pupil records, records of trust meetings, minutes from governor meetings, school development plans and school self-evaluation documents.
- Inspectors considered 39 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers, Ofsted Parent View. This included 30 comments from parents in the free-text facility.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- Inspectors took into account the 35 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff. Inspectors also met with staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Jonny Wallace, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Helen McCarney	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Cloke	Ofsted Inspector

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