

Inspection of a good school: Passmores Academy

Tracyes Road, Harlow, Essex CM18 6JH

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 February 2024

Outcome

Passmores Academy continues to be a good school.

The principal of this school is Natalie Christie. The school is part of The Passmores Co-operative Learning Community, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Victor Goddard, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Neil Lawson.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school are warm and welcoming. They have high regard for staff and each other. Of particular note, is their support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils who attend the specially resourced provision, the Hub, integrate very well into the life of the main school. This includes taking part in lessons as well as social times. Pupils have a strong understanding of difference. Being inclusive is at the heart of the school.

There is a wealth of extracurricular opportunities for pupils. From taking part in musical productions to curling, there is something for everyone. Many pupils take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Pupils are proud of the contributions they make to leading the school. They discuss key issues through pupil panels, run mental health support for younger pupils and fundraise for the school's charity, 'No Child Without'.

Pupils have a strong work ethic and are keen to do well in their studies. Most of the time pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. When a pupil may struggle with their behaviour, they get the support they need to meet staff's high expectations.

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

The school has a broad and ambitious curriculum, based on the vision that pupils will receive a rich and well-rounded education. There is a strategy to increase the proportion of pupils who study the suite of subjects known as the English Baccalaureate. Modern foreign languages (MFL) are popular subjects, and more pupils are choosing to study the humanities.

Pupils who attend the school regularly do well in their national examinations at the end of Year 11. This is because the curriculum is well-planned. It builds upon pupils' starting points and ensures they learn progressively over time. Where pupils are persistently absent, they do not perform as well as they should. This is a key factor as to why published outcomes are below what is typical nationally. The school has taken decisive action to improve this. They are successfully re-engaging pupils back into education.

Staff have strong subject knowledge. They effectively break down learning into manageable chunks. They check pupils' understanding before they move on to more complex work. Many pupils talk confidently about their prior learning. They connect ideas from across the curriculum with ease. Sometimes, teachers do not manage their time well in lessons. For example, a few teachers focus too much on pupils' recall of prior learning. On other occasions, staff ask too many closed questions where pupils can guess the answer. Here pupils' learning slows and the depth of their understanding of a topic is limited.

Pupils who are learning to read are well-supported. Those who learn in the nurture groups are expertly guided to decode texts. They read texts that are age appropriate. Staff are ambitious in this regard. For example, Year 8 pupils were reading, and comparing, extracts of the modern version of 'Much Ado About Nothing' as well as the Shakespearean version. Fluent readers read widely and often.

There is extensive provision for pupils with SEND. Staff run bespoke programmes which focus on removing barriers to pupils' education. They liaise effectively with external agencies to ensure pupils get the support they need. Staff thoughtfully use pupil's support plans to adapt their lessons for pupils' differing needs. They are mostly successful with this. There is still more work to do to cater for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. While suspensions are reducing, this group of pupils are in receipt of more suspensions than their peers. To address this, the school is developing specialist provision through the Den.

The school has a strong focus on giving pupils rich experiences beyond academic learning. Pupils receive appropriate input on themes such as healthy relationships, consent and online safety. Careers education is comprehensive. Pupils learn about potential pathways, including apprenticeships.

The trust and members of the local governing body know the school well. They make sure that the school is led and managed effectively. Staff are proud to work at the school. They feel valued and listened to.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some variability with staff's use of the school's pedagogical approaches to help pupils know and remember more over time. On occasion, pupils' learning is hindered when retrieval activities are set that last too long or when tasks do not give pupils the opportunity to deepen their responses. The school should ensure that teachers set work for pupils that has a clear and timely purpose and helps pupils develop and articulate a rich understanding of the curriculum.

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	137445
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10318611
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,204
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Neil Lawson
CEO of the trust	Victor Goddard
Principal	Natalie Christie
Website	www.passmoresacademy.com
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The principal took full responsibility for the role in September 2023. Prior to this the principal shared the position with the current CEO for the trust.
- The trust has delegated some responsibilities for oversight of the school to a local governing body.
- The school manages specially resourced provision, the Hub, for pupils with autism. This caters for approximately 15 pupils of secondary age. Places are commissioned by Essex local authority.
- The school uses 13 providers of alternative provision, one of which is registered.
- 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 ungraded inspection under section 8 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 the vice-chair of the trust board for The Passmores Co-operative Learning Community, a trustee, the chief executive officer of the trust and representatives of the local governing body.
- Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders, the leader of the Hub, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- The lead inspector spoke with some leaders of alternative provision.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, computing, modern foreign languages and physical education. For each deep dive inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum for science and the provision for supporting pupils to learn to read.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times. They considered pupils' views about behaviour in school. They also spoke with staff about pupils' behaviour and staff's workload and well-being.
- 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 considered responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys. They considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments, and a letter.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gareth Cross

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Ofsted Inspector

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