

Inspection of The Bicester School

Queen's Avenue, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 2NS

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 March 2024

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
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| The quality of education | Good |
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| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
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| Personal development | Good |
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| Leadership and management | Good |
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| Sixth-form provision | Good |
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| Previous inspection grade | Good |
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The headteacher of this school is Tony Rushworth. This school is part of Activate Learning Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Joanne Harper, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Nicholas Evans, who is responsible for this school and five others.

What is it like to attend this school?

The core values of this school are 'respect, resilience and responsibility'. They shine through the day-to-day work of this positive and happy community. Pupils are warm and friendly. They form positive relationships with each other and with staff. In turn, Staff show a genuine care for pupils. They all share a commitment to provide pupils with the best possible education. As a result, pupils thrive at this inclusive school.

The school provides learning and wider opportunities that pupils enjoy and benefit from. Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain. They say they are encouraged to respect difference and they really do. There are high expectations of pupils' behaviour, and these expectations are met. There are strong standards of behaviour. Pupils say that they have trusted adults with whom they can share concerns. On the rare occasions when bullying happens, it is addressed effectively.

Parents are positive about the school. They like its caring and supportive ethos. As one parent said, expressing views typical of other parents, 'All pupils are looked after and given what they need. The Bicester School goes above and beyond to help students and families.'

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

The school's curriculum is ambitious and well considered. It is underpinned by the aim that all pupils will develop the knowledge they need to be successful during their time in school and beyond. The school has identified what complex and important knowledge pupils need to learn. The school has adopted an approach to teaching which ensures consistent and effective elements are always included. This helps pupils know what to expect. Pupils regularly revisit knowledge so that they confidently recall their learning. Teachers provide useful feedback. Pupils use this to reflect on what they have done well and how they can continue to improve. Most pupils develop secure knowledge of the subjects they study. Currently, pupils' achievement is strong. In the past, pupils have achieved well, but in 2023 there was a decline in GCSE examinations results overall. The school is taking the right robust action to ensure that this is not repeated and the impact of this on current pupils' achievement is very clear indeed.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well overall. They successfully learn the curriculum alongside their peers. There are clear procedures in place to identify pupils' needs. Teachers adapt their lessons for pupils with SEND using information about pupils' specific needs. The school has developed effective systems to support pupils in the early stages of learning to read. These help pupils to improve their reading and to access the rest of the curriculum.

Pupils' conduct is calm and orderly. They behave well. They treat one another with respect. The systems to manage pupils' behaviour are used consistently by staff. As a result, learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. The school has also encountered significant challenges in terms of attendance post-COVID and the

school is working hard to address them. Nevertheless, some pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, miss out on important parts of the curriculum and find it hard to catch up. The school uses a range of strategies to promote attendance. These strategies include rewards, meetings with parents and carers and providing information about the importance of attending school. The school has taken steps to mitigate this lost time by delivering additional learning recovery sessions for pupils, including special 'Saturday schools'.

Pupils benefit from a strong personal development programme. It is carefully mapped out for all year groups. Wider opportunities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, are well used and valued by pupils. The school uses opportunities such as these and residential visits to help pupils to become more independent young people. Pupils feel safe at school and know that they could talk to staff if they had any problems regarding themselves or concerns about others. The school ensures that pupils know how to keep themselves safe and well, including online safety. As a result, pupils are well prepared for adult life.

The sixth-form curriculum is equally ambitious as in the rest of the school and builds on what pupils have studied in the previous key stages. Indeed, sixth-form provision is a strength of the school, outcomes for A-level are strong and students in the sixth form greatly benefit from their time there. The school has a wide range of subjects that are available to students. These reflect students' changing interests. Lessons are calm, focused and intellectually interesting. Students develop secure knowledge of the subjects they study. Through the school's careers programme, students are well informed about the options available to them when they leave the school.

Trustees hold an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas to develop. They are well informed by audits and reports that examine specific aspects of the school's work. The school garners very harmonious and positive views from all stakeholders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not attend as well as they could and a number, including those who are disadvantaged, are persistently absent from school. Consequently, those pupils do not always remember their learning sufficiently nor benefit fully from the rich wider personal development opportunities offered by school. The school must ensure that pupils' attendance, especially those who are disadvantaged, rises further.

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 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

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| Unique reference number | 142024 |
| Local authority | Oxfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10288052 |
| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| 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 | 1,283 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 127 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Nicholas Evans |
| CEO of the trust | Joanne Harper |
| Headteacher | Tony Rushworth |
| Website | www.thebicesterschool.org.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 5 and 6 June 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- This school is part of Activate Learning Education Trust.
- This school currently uses three registered and two unregistered alternative providers.
- 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, history, music and geography. 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.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector/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.
- The lead inspector held an online meeting with the local governing council, and with trustees, including the chair of the board. She held a separate meeting with the CEO.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through their responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and parents' free-text comments. Inspectors also talked with parents on the morning of the first day of the inspection.
- Inspectors gathered pupils' views through meetings, visits to lessons and discussions at other times of the school day.
- Inspectors took account of staff's views during meetings with them and through their responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey.

Inspection team

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|------------------------------|------------------|
| Ginny Rhodes, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Gemma Williamson | Ofsted Inspector |
| Martin Dyer | Ofsted Inspector |
| Peter Fry | Ofsted Inspector |
| John Burridge | Ofsted Inspector |

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