

Inspection of Biggleswade Academy

Mead End, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 8JU

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

The principal of this school is Mark Steer. This school is the only member of the Life Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Mark Steer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Chris Jones.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are extremely polite and friendly at Biggleswade Academy. The four virtues of ambition, determination, respect and integrity permeate school life. Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate these virtues. They are proud when the adults recognise this.

From early years through to Year 8, pupils come into school happily each day. They thrive in the safety of the school environments, both at The Lawns and at the school's main campus. They enjoy social time in the dining room or in the school's extensive outdoor spaces.

Pupils respect learning. In the classrooms, they are very attentive to their teachers' clear explanations. Pupils know the adults have high expectations of them and are keen to meet these. As a result, most pupils achieve well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

There is an increasingly wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities. Pupils can choose from a range of clubs, including yoga, singing, chess and a variety of sports. Memorable trips, such as a visit to Shuttleworth Museum or a faith tour of different places of worship, enrich the curriculum. Other trips to Thorpe Park or Legoland, for example, give pupils the chance to let off steam and have fun.

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

The school has constructed a broad, balanced and ambitious curriculum. It identifies the key knowledge pupils should learn in each subject, and the order in which they should learn it. This helps pupils to build secure learning over time. In some areas, the curriculum does not start in early years. In these areas, children are not as well prepared for later learning as they could be. They may not always learn the foundational knowledge they need.

The school's early years provision is spread across two sites. It is split into different rooms for different age groups. Throughout early years, children enjoy warm relationships with the adults. In some parts of the provision, such as at The Lawns, highly skilled adults support children's learning extremely well. However, this is not universally the case. Along with the weaknesses in the early years curriculum, some opportunities to promote effective learning are missed. The activities set up for children are not always purposeful. As a result, children do not progress as quickly as they might.

The school has strengthened the systems for identifying and supporting pupils with SEND. Teachers skilfully adapt their teaching so that pupils with SEND can access the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils in the school's specially resourced provision get a bespoke curriculum. It prepares them well for transition to their next school.

Teachers are confident about the subjects they teach. They revisit previous learning often. This helps pupils remember what they have learned. Teachers use a range of assessment techniques. During lessons, they use questioning to check how well pupils are learning. They promptly address any errors or misconceptions that arise. At the end of a topic, teachers use quizzes or other checks to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers, or curriculum leaders, adjust their plans to address these.

Reading is a priority. In early years, adults share stories, songs and rhymes to kick-start a love of reading. Older pupils enjoy daily 'class reader' sessions. These expose them to a range of high-quality authors and texts. Early reading skills are developed through phonics lessons in Nursery, Reception and key stage 1. Well-trained adults deliver these. Any pupils who struggle get targeted support to catch up. Most pupils are fluent readers by the end of key stage 1. Reading lessons for older pupils widen their vocabulary and teach them a range of higher-level reading skills.

The school's 'Education4Life' curriculum prepares pupils for their futures. Pupils learn about issues such as relationships, personal safety and healthy lifestyles. The school's virtues support pupils' tolerant, respectful approach to diversity in all its forms. Pupils' understanding of British values such as democracy or the rule of law is mature. Several roles offer pupils the opportunity to develop their character or sense of responsibility. These include house captains, litter pickers or members of the pupil forum.

The school is going through an unsettling period, as it prepares to change its age range and become a primary school in September 2024. Senior leaders and trustees are determined to minimise the impact of these changes on staff well-being. Staff appreciate this. They value the training they get to develop their skills and expertise. Trustees are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and next steps. They share senior leaders' ambition to provide high-quality learning experiences for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are inconsistencies in the curriculum and where it starts. In some areas, curriculum planning does not start in early years. This means that, in these areas, children are not as well prepared for different subjects in key stage 1 as they could be. The school should ensure that curriculum planning starts in its nursery and preschool, so that children have the foundational skills and knowledge they need by the time they enter key stage 1.
- In the early years, there are differences in the level of staff's expertise in working with the youngest children. Not all staff have received the same training. Therefore, sometimes children are not effectively supported and learning

opportunities are sometimes missed. The school should ensure that staff are appropriately trained so that, across all parts of the early years provision, children get a consistently high quality of education.

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	137947
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10323715
Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,170
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Chris Jones
Principal and CEO	Mark Steer
Website	www.biggleswadeacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	25 and 26 June 2019 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school became an academy in August 2012. It is currently the only member of the Life Academies Trust.
- There is provision for two-year-olds in the school's early years settings.
- There is a specially resourced provision for 12 pupils with autism. This provision is for pupils aged 8 to 13.
- The Lawns Nursery, which is part of the school, operates from separate premises. This is at The Baulk, Biggleswade SG18 0PT.
- The school used the services of four unregistered alternative providers.

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 met with a range of leaders, including senior leaders, the special educational needs co-ordinator, trustees, including the chair of trustees. The lead inspector met with the CEO of the trust and spoke with the school's improvement partner on the telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, art, computing and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and spoke with some pupils about their learning. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector listened to several pupils read to a familiar adult.
- 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 reviewed a range of school documentation and policies. These included the school development plan and minutes of trustee meetings.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's parent and staff questionnaires. They spoke with pupils, parents and staff to gather their views of the school.

Inspection team

Caroline Crozier, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Helen Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Danny Wagstaff	Ofsted Inspector
Emma Breckenridge	Ofsted Inspector
Carley Holliman	Ofsted Inspector

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