

Inspection of Chichester Free School

Hunston Road, Chichester, West Sussex PO20 1NP

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 May 2024

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

The executive principal of this school is Louise New. The head of the primary phase is James Garner and the head of the secondary phase is Ben Phillips. This school is part of Sussex Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jonathan Morris, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jonathan Ash-Edwards.

What is it like to attend this school?

Chichester Free School's vision is to 'nurture, challenge and inspire' pupils both inside and outside the classroom at this vibrant all-through school. This is realised consistently well, not least because of strong leadership throughout. Children in Reception settle quickly. They learn to be kind through carefully selected co-operative and engaging activities. Older pupils are respectful and friendly to each other. Differences are respected and pupils rightly believe their school is highly inclusive.

The school's curriculum provides countless opportunities to develop talents and interests that pupils relish and benefit from extensively. Pupils' commitment and dedication to the wide range of clubs is impressive. A growing number of pupils belong to the successful combined cadet force. This teaches them valuable character traits and develops vital leadership skills. A wide range of sport, music and performance clubs supplement the vast array of academic intervention and revision support clubs. Activities such as Lego club, mindfulness, film club and the eagerly contested chess league are hugely popular.

Parents and pupils speak very positively of the school. They appreciate the caring and supportive ethos that permeates all aspects. One parent, representing the views of many, said, 'my child is thriving at the school. The children regularly receive recognition for working hard and this encourages them even further.'

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

The school's curriculum is broad and ambitious. In all subjects, the school has identified the precise knowledge and skills pupils should learn and in which order. Expert staff present information clearly. Pupils revisit key knowledge regularly to help them remember it. Teachers provide purposeful feedback. This helps pupils reflect on what they have done well and how to improve their work further. In a few subjects, sometimes staff do not make the most effective activity choices to enable pupils to learn as well as they could. Here, pupils do not develop deep thinking or remember important information as successfully as elsewhere. Leaders are aware of this and are working hard to address this. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs accurately identified and, as a result, they receive effective support. Learning support assistants provide valuable support to all pupils.

Children in Reception start learning to read as soon as they join the school. Staff receive expert training in the school's chosen phonics programme. However, there are some inconsistencies in how well staff use this training. Pupils read books that match the sounds they know. This develops their reading accuracy and confidence. Pupils who are at risk of falling behind receive extra phonics sessions to support them. In the secondary phase, the school accurately identifies pupils who find reading more difficult. They receive targeted support from experts to help them catch up quickly.

Pupils' conduct is calm and orderly. They behave well in lessons and during social times. The simple but effective behaviour management system is well known by all. Staff apply this consistently. Pupils relish earning house points for positive choices. When pupils make negative choices, staff deal swiftly and fairly to correct them. Pupils accept the consequences of 'behaviour points'. Some pupils benefit from specialist support in 'Tree House' (primary) and 'Eagle Point' (secondary). Here, expert staff provide bespoke academic and pastoral support. Throughout the school pupils learn vital skills of self-respect and self-regulation. The school employs a wide range of strategies to promote positive attendance. This includes personalised support through 'soft starts' in the mornings for a small number of pupils.

Support for pupils' mental and physical health is a priority. Pastoral care is exceptionally strong. Pupils learn important information about how to keep themselves safe from an early age. This includes online safety. The personal development curriculum addresses essential elements such as age-appropriate sex and relationships education sensitively. Pupils feel safe at school and know who to talk to if they have concerns or worries. The provision for careers information, education, advice and guidance is praiseworthy. It is designed and delivered by expert staff who share their exemplary practice with other local schools. Pupils receive impartial guidance about their potential next steps. As a result, they are extremely well prepared for adult life.

School leaders, the trust and local governors have a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas that require further development. The local governing body provides robust support and challenge to the school. Staff value the school's focus on leadership development deeply. Staff are proud to work at the school and feel valued. They appreciate the well-being support they receive from leaders and feel that leaders are considerate of their workload. Staff view the opportunities to work collaboratively with other schools in the trust positively.

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 small number of subjects, there is variability in the implementation of the curriculum. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could in these subjects. The school should continue its work to improve consistency, so that pupils achieve the best possible outcomes.

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	139668
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10321976
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1069
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jonathan Ash-Edwards
CEO of trust	Jonathan Morris
Principal	Louise New (executive principal)
Website	www.chichesterfreeschool.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 February 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Chichester Free School joined the Sussex Learning Trust in September 2023.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes in leadership. The interim principal left the school and a new executive principal took up her post in September 2019.
- Shortly after the last inspection, the school began a phased closure of the sixth form, with the final Year 13 pupils leaving in August 2021. The chair of the local governing body took up his post in September 2023.
- The school currently uses two registered alternative providers to meet the needs of a small number of 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.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders of the school.
- The lead inspector held meetings with some governors, including the chair of governors and the chair of the trust. She also met with the trust's chief executive officer, deputy chief executive officer and the school's external improvement consultant who works on behalf of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: Early reading, English, mathematics, art and design, history and design technology. 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 considered a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation, published information about pupils' performance and minutes of governors' meetings.
- Inspectors spoke to a wide range of pupils and observed their behaviour in lessons and at social times.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including free-text responses. They also took account of the responses to the staff and pupil surveys and gathered the views of parents, staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Linda Culling, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
James Broadbridge	His Majesty's Inspector
Mike Boddington	Ofsted Inspector
Debra Anderson	Ofsted Inspector

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