

Inspection of a good school: Mildenhall College Academy

The Hub, Sheldrick Way, Mildenhall, Suffolk IP28 7JX

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 May 2024

Outcome

Mildenhall College Academy continues to be a good school.

The principal of this school is Nicola Hood. This school is part of Academy Transformation 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), Nick Weller, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Pat Beanland.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy the positive relationships they have with adults at school. They appreciate that they have someone to talk to if they need to. Many older pupils support younger pupils through the school's peer mentoring scheme. This provides pupils with a listening ear when they need it or help with their learning.

Pupils benefit from the many opportunities to be involved in the school community. They are positive about the wide range of clubs that they participate in. These build their confidence and help them develop new skills, for example in the chess and singing clubs.

Pupils appreciate the school's increasingly ambitious curriculum. It is often well taught, and pupils receive appropriate support from adults when needed. Pupils enjoy being challenged in their lessons and are pleased when they achieve well.

During social time, pupils manage their behaviour well. The atmosphere around site, including outside, is often calm and friendly. Pupils enjoy chatting to their friends or playing football. In class, many pupils display the same high levels of good behaviour. This is particularly the case for the older pupils. Sometimes, younger pupils experience disruption to their learning. This frustrates them as they want to work hard.

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

With effective trust support, the school has embedded an ambitious curriculum in most subjects across the school. The curriculum has been designed to build and develop pupils' skills and knowledge from key stage 3 through to sixth form. In many subjects, teachers have a secure understanding of the standards that pupils should be achieving at different

points in the year. They are ambitious for what pupils should be able to do from Year 7. In these subjects, teachers consistently provide work that is challenging, so that pupils are well prepared for their next steps in their learning. Teachers regularly check what pupils understand. They make sure that the work they give to pupils is closely matched to what they already know and need to learn from their starting points. If any adaptations are needed, for example for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), these are quickly provided. In these areas, pupils consistently achieve highly, including those with SEND.

In a small minority of areas, the key stage 3 curriculum is not sufficiently well planned or ambitious. Teachers are not always clear what pupils should know or be able to do at different points in the curriculum. They do not check precisely enough what pupils have learned or use the information from these checks to clarify pupils' misunderstandings. Sometimes, the work they give to pupils is too easy for them and does not support them to achieve highly.

The school has a programme in place that helps pupils to develop their reading fluency. Teachers are skilled at supporting pupils' literacy in lessons. Across different subjects, teachers use a range of appropriate strategies to effectively help pupils understand and use key vocabulary. This benefits all pupils, including those with SEND.

The school identified an increase in challenging behaviour among some pupils in school. Leaders responded by implementing a new behaviour policy. Where staff apply the behaviour policy as the school intends, pupils' behaviour is impressive. Pupils listen respectfully and follow instructions, and there is very little disruption to learning. In these lessons, pupils are very productive. They work hard and achieve well. However, the new behaviour policy is not fully embedded across the school. A minority of teachers do not have high enough expectations for how pupils should behave. Some teachers allow too much disruption to learning, particularly in key stage 3. Pupils and parents find this disappointing as they believe it negatively impacts upon how well some pupils achieve and enjoy their lessons.

Leaders' approach to tackling persistent absenteeism, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, is robust. They monitor pupils' attendance very closely and provide high levels of support to help pupils return to school.

Pupils benefit from a well-planned curriculum that supports their personal development. During 'morning meetings' and 'skills for life' lessons, pupils learn about important themes such as managing finances, healthy relationships, and respect. Pupils value the discussions they have around these topics. There are many opportunities for pupils to go on trips and to develop their interests. A history trip to the Tower of London, a skiing trip to Italy and a visit to Belgium's battlefields were particularly popular.

The trust has a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school. It provides the school with effective challenge and support. Staff feel that leaders support them well.

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 few areas of the curriculum, plans are not precise enough in the identification of the core knowledge and skills that pupils need to acquire, particularly at key stage 3. Where this is the case, staff are not sufficiently skilled in planning and delivering lessons which are well designed to deepen and develop pupils' subject knowledge and skills. As a result of this lack of clarity in curriculum planning, assessment is not effective at identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge. This leads to some pupils not achieving as highly as they should. The school needs to make sure all areas of the curriculum are well planned, and staff are appropriately trained in how to deliver them effectively, so pupils achieve consistently well across all subjects.
- Some teachers do not consistently apply the school's behaviour policy, particularly in key stage 3. This leads to disruption in some classes, preventing pupils from getting on with their learning. This frustrates pupils, and their parents, who want a consistently high-quality learning experience across all lessons. Leaders need to ensure that all staff have high expectations for how all pupils should behave and that all staff follow the academy's behaviour policy as intended.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2015.

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	139867
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10323735
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1,336
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Pat Beanland
CEO of the trust	Nick Weller
Principal	Nicola Hood
Website	www.mildenhall.attrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The principal was appointed in September 2018.
- 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.
- The school currently uses 14 alternative providers. Five are registered and nine are unregistered.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, geography, design and technology, and physical education. For each deep dive, the 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, 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 met with trustees and governors and reviewed documentation relating to governance and school improvement.
- The lead inspector met with the deputy CEO and other trust staff and scrutinised documentation relating to school improvement and quality assurance.
- Inspectors met with school leaders to discuss the school's approach to using alternative provision.
- Inspectors reviewed behaviour and attendance records and observed pupils' behaviour around the site.
- An inspector met with leaders to discuss the school's approach to pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from different years, including single-sex groups, to hear their views about school.
- Inspectors reviewed documentation relating to pupils with SEND.
- The inspectors considered responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They also reviewed responses to Ofsted's staff survey and pupil survey.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Marc White

His Majesty's Inspector

Alan Gray

Ofsted Inspector

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