

Inspection of Venturers' Academy

Withywood Road, Withywood, Bristol BS13 9AX

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 May 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils benefit from positive relationships at this caring school. Staff help pupils to communicate and interact with increasing success. However, the overall quality of education is not yet good. The school is aware that, until recently, expectations of what pupils could achieve were too low. Although curriculum planning has improved and reading is now a priority, these elements are implemented inconsistently, and expectations of pupils remain variable. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

The school is usually calm and purposeful. However, due to their needs, pupils can present with challenging behaviours. Staff know each pupil and their individual needs very well. They use this to establish positive and trusted relationships. Every pupil has an individual plan to help them manage their own behaviour. Staff use this effectively. As a result, pupils' behaviour typically improves considerably over time. Bullying is exceptionally rare, if it ever happens.

Pupils are happy and feel safe. They know that staff care for them. Pupils develop character and self-confidence. They learn about themselves, ways to keep healthy and how to access their community successfully. This means they are well prepared for the transition to adulthood.

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

Venturers' Academy is in a period of transition due to a focus on rapidly improving provision. Until recently, there has also been considerable change to the leadership, teaching and support staff teams. Similarly, the trust that oversees the school is about to merge with another. This all means some members of the school community are unsettled. Not all are clear about the reasons for the changes that have taken place. As a result, although the school is now moving in the right direction, some staff and parents have lost confidence.

The school has made sensible use of recent external evaluations in order to improve provision. For example, the school has redesigned the curriculum to ensure it is fit for purpose. These changes are still in development. Curriculum planning has been strengthened so that it is better sequenced. However, its implementation remains variable in quality, including in the early years. For example, some staff do not use the new curriculum effectively when planning sequences of work for their class. Others are new to the school and are developing their understanding of teaching pupils with autism.

Due to their needs, pupils often rely heavily on the staff who work with them. This can lead to some staff not demanding enough of pupils. Some pupils become overly dependent on the staff who work with them, particularly when they are asked to apply a new idea for themselves. Consequently, some pupils do not retain key knowledge independently and so don't achieve as well as their peers.

Reading is now a priority. The school has implemented a common approach to teaching early reading, including in the early years. Staff consistently follow the new reading programme. However, crucially, the pronunciation of sounds when modelled by staff is sometimes not precise enough. This means pupils often learn their sounds wrongly, and so struggle to blend them independently when reading.

Nevertheless, there are some strengths. For example, the implementation of some subjects, such as physical education and personal, social and health education, is strong. Similarly, the school has ensured that staff know how to meet the needs of pupils with autism very well. Staff utilise a range of communication approaches that help pupils learn how to make choices and engage with increasing success with the world around them. Pupils respond well to the caring and attentive approach of teachers, including in the sixth form and early years. This contributes to pupils' improved behaviour over time.

Pupils' personal development is promoted well. The strength of relationships and the appropriate focus on pupils' individual needs helps them to develop better self-awareness. Many learn to make meaningful friendships. As a result, pupils' social development is particularly strong. The curriculum promotes high-quality opportunities for pupils to work together, particularly when in the sixth form. Pupils learn to respect each other and understand diversity. Work experience is a fundamental element to pupils' programmes of study. As a result, pupils are supported effectively for what they will do when they leave Venturers' Academy.

The school has recently looked to raise expectations relating to attendance. Due to a significant rise in persistent absence, attendance is some way off the exceptional levels shown by pupils before the pandemic. The school has identified which pupils staff should focus on and has started to plan how to support these families to improve attendance. However, the school's plans are too early in their implementation to see impact.

The sixth-form curriculum has been revamped and improved. Curriculum thinking is increasingly ambitious and looks to build on an already strong record of securing sustained education, employment or training when students leave the school. Staff implement the improved curriculum consistently and well. Students benefit from individual programmes of study. These are linked to students' interests and aspirations. For example, students study enterprise skills and learn how to apply these through work experience and planned routes into employment.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The implementation of the curriculum is too variable in quality, including in the early years. This means that pupils do not learn the new curriculum as well as they should. The school should look to secure greater consistency in the quality of the implementation of the curriculum so that pupils achieve more.
- The school has not successfully secured the confidence of some members of the community. Several staff and parents share concerns about the regularity and amount of staff change and how the school communicates with them. The school should improve how it engages and communicates with all members of the community so that there is greater clarity about the changes being implemented and why.
- The school's strategies for improving attendance are new. This means there is little sign of this improving to return to pre-pandemic levels. The school should embed and refine its strategies to ensure that more pupils attend well.

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

Unique reference number	142780
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	10315626
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	243
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	12
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gail Bragg
Headteacher	Trystan Williams
Website	www.venturersacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Venturers' Academy is a special free school for pupils who have autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils are placed by Bristol City Council. However, the school also provides for pupils from North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Bath and Northeast Somerset local authorities.
- The academy has three sites. The main site, which provides for secondary-aged pupils and sixth-form students is located at Hareclive Road, Withywood, Bristol BS13 9JW. There is a primary school site, including early years provision at Withywood Road, Withywood, Bristol BS13 9AX and another at Lichfield Road, Brislington, Bristol BS4 4BJ.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

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 leaders, including the executive headteacher, deputy headteacher, pastoral lead, lead for the quality of education and the heads of school at each academy site.
- Inspectors spoke to the chair of trustees. They also met with two members of the local governing body, including the chair.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including reading), mathematics, physical education, personal, social and health education and the 'life skills' pathway. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at curriculum planning and listened to some pupils read.
- 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 took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including questionnaire and free-text responses. They also considered responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including documents relating to governance, leaders' evaluations, plans for school improvement and information about the school's curriculum.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Teresa Hill	Ofsted Inspector
Katie Brockway	Ofsted Inspector

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