

Inspection of a good school: Verulam School

Brampton Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 4PR

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 May 2024

Outcome

Verulam School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Fergal Moane. This school is part of the Alban Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Alan Gray, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Deborah Strazza.

What is it like to attend this school?

The majority of pupils are settled and contented to be at Verulam. They feel safe in school, and they are kept safe inside the school building and around the site. Most pupils behave sensibly. Those who break the school rules are dealt with firmly but fairly.

The school has a long and varied history. Some traditions are proudly continued, such as the prefect and house systems. These provide good opportunities for sixth-form students to show leadership and act as role models for younger pupils. The school is also aware of contemporary issues and prepares pupils well in an age-appropriate way for life in the 21st century.

Expectations are high for academic achievement. Pupils achieve well in the majority of curriculum subjects. The school provides very well for most aspects of pupils' wider development. Overall, a good range of popular co-curricular activities are provided. While the school recently put on a successful drama production, opportunities and participation in the performing arts are not as strong, for example, as sports. The school is developing this aspect of its provision.

Working relationships between staff and pupils are respectful. The sixth form provides a structured learning environment. It also provides opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and the self-responsibility needed for future study.

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

The school provides a broad, ambitious curriculum to pupils in all key stages. A wide

range of GCSE, A-level and vocational options in key stages 4 and 5 reflect pupils' needs and interests.

Typically, the curriculum is well organised in a way that systematically builds pupils' knowledge. Teachers have strong command of their subjects. This helps pupils and students achieve very well in most areas, including in the core subjects of English and mathematics and in history and geography. In just a few subjects, the curriculum is not planned in so much detail and, consequently, the standards achieved are not as consistently high.

New assessment strategies were introduced across the whole school last year. Teachers employ common approaches for checking pupils' knowledge in lessons, including questioning and asking pupils to recall previously learned information. While these are mostly effective, on occasion, they are not always adapted sufficiently to reflect the unique characteristics of different subjects. Additionally, in a few instances, too much time is spent testing knowledge through assessments. This limits the time teachers have available to teach new knowledge. As a result, some opportunities are missed for pupils to gain the breadth and depth of knowledge that they need to achieve highly.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are clearly identified and follow the same curriculum as their peers. 'The Hub' is a safe space where they are given bespoke individual support and nurturing. This includes targeted, effective support which helps the weakest readers become more fluent and confident. In turn, this gives them better access to the curriculum. Staff are given detailed information about these pupils' needs. Staff take this into account when arranging their classroom seating plans. While some teachers make adaptations and adjustments as required to help meet individual needs, this is not consistent. This occasionally slows learning for pupils with SEND because they struggle to complete their work.

Attendance levels are improving. Leaders have good knowledge of the reasons why pupils are absent and have a range of effective strategies to support them. Sixth-form students are confident and smart in their appearance and attitudes. Students who join from other schools, including girls, are quickly welcomed and helped to feel part of the school community. In Years 7 to 11, there are clear, high expectations of how pupils should behave. The great majority understand these and behave well in class and around the school. Pupils who misbehave are dealt with appropriately, with a balance of sanctions and opportunities for reflection. This helps them improve. While accurate records are kept of behaviour incidents, these are not always analysed in sufficient detail to help leaders and staff monitor any trends for individuals or groups of pupils or provide them with additional support.

Many aspects of provision for pupils' and students' personal development are excellent. In particular, the personal, social and health education curriculum in all key stages is well thought through and very well resourced. This is supported by additional strategies focused particularly on mental health and well-being. The school is an inclusive place where pupils and students can be confident about being themselves.

The majority of staff enjoy working work at Verulam. They, and pupils, appreciate the way

in which leaders are supportive and are visible around the school. The only concerns they have are around workload related to assessment, including the strategy introduced last year.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's new assessment strategies are not always as effective as they could be. In some areas, methods for testing pupils' progress do not always reflect the unique characteristics of the subject being taught, for example where the emphasis is on practical skills rather than factual knowledge. In a few instances, too much time is spent assessing, meaning that less time is spent teaching new knowledge and pupils do not achieve as highly as they do in other areas of the curriculum. The school should review its assessment methods and policies, including consulting with subject leaders, to ascertain the most effective ways of testing pupils' knowledge in their areas.
- The needs of pupils with SEND are clearly identified and well known. While effective discrete support is provided through the SEND hub, support in classrooms is not as consistently good. While teaching is often adapted well so that all pupils can access the curriculum, occasionally teachers do not always adapt lessons as effectively to reflect these pupils' learning needs. As a result, pupils with SEND sometimes find it more difficult to complete their work. The school, in partnership with the trust, should provide the training and support needed for all staff to become skilled in making the necessary adjustments to the teaching so that pupils with SEND are able to make consistently strong progress across all areas of the curriculum.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2018.

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	137038
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10318605
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,066
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Deborah Strazza
CEO of the trust	Alan Gray
Headteacher	Fergal Moane
Website	www.verulamschool.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Alban Academies Trust.
- Verulam School is one of three local schools in the BeauSanVer Education Trust sixth-form consortium. Together, the three schools are able to offer students a wider range of vocational and academic courses for post-16 study.
- The current headteacher took up post at the start of the summer term of 2024.
- The school currently uses one registered alternative provision.
- 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

- 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 these subjects: English, modern foreign languages and history. 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 also discussed other curriculum subjects with leaders, looked at pupils' work and visited lessons.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the trust, the chair of the local governing body and three other trustees.
- 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.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff and with pupils from across the school. They took account of 76 responses to Ofsted's inspection survey for school staff, 252 responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils and 214 responses to Ofsted's survey of parents, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Mark Phillips, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Joe Creswick

Ofsted Inspector

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