

# Inspection of an outstanding school: The Fermain Academy

Beswick Street, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 8JF

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Inspection dates:

2 and 3 July 2024

## Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Helen Phillips. This school is part of Youth Engagement Schools 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), Nic Brindle, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Robert Halsall.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend this school have faced considerable difficulties in their prior education. Some have been permanently excluded from other schools. Many pupils have had adverse childhood experiences that have interrupted their learning. As a result, pupils often arrive with large gaps in their knowledge. Some pupils struggle to manage their own behaviour.

The school maintains the highest ambition for pupils. It helps pupils to develop self-belief and to aspire for their future lives. Pupils successfully re-engage with their education at this school. They gain the qualifications and skills that they need to move on in their lives.

Pupils build warm, trusting relationships with staff. They told inspectors how the support that they receive helps them to improve their behaviour and to manage their emotions positively. They quickly come to enjoy attending school once more.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities that support their wider development. For instance, they value being able to participate in adventurous activities such as kayaking and indoor climbing. These experiences help pupils to build confidence and self-esteem.

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

The school has designed a highly ambitious curriculum. Pupils study a broad range of academic subjects. In most subjects, the school has identified the knowledge that pupils

need to learn and when it should be taught. However, due to a recent influx of new staff, there are times when this curriculum is not delivered as consistently well as the school intends. For instance, some staff lack expertise in using assessment strategies to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and adapting learning activities to address these gaps. Sometimes, staff move on before pupils' learning is secure. This hinders some pupils from building a solid foundation of knowledge in some subjects.

The school assesses additional needs that pupils may have effectively, including any special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This helps staff to identify strategies to support each pupil. Pupils who join the school with gaps in their reading knowledge benefit from effective help. Most pupils develop into fluent readers during their time at school. The school has recently prioritised reading for pleasure. Many pupils are now reading more often than before.

By the end of key stage 4, most pupils are well prepared to take an impressive suite of qualifications. A comprehensive careers programme helps pupils to make informed decisions about their future. Pupils, including pupils with SEND, achieve well and successfully move on to positive post-16 destinations.

Pupils have often had irregular patterns of attendance at their previous schools. Staff get to know pupils well and develop a keen understanding of the barriers that they face. Staff tirelessly support pupils to attend school more often. Typically, this is successful. Most pupils' rates of attendance improve throughout their placement. However, this has been interrupted by recent changes in staffing. These changes have also hindered the school's analysis of which strategies are the most effective in raising attendance over time.

Pupils value the rewards that they earn by meeting the school's expectations for their conduct. When pupils struggle to behave as the school expects, staff respond swiftly. The support that pupils receive from staff helps them to learn to regulate their emotions. As a result, the school is usually calm and orderly.

The school ensures that pupils are well prepared for adulthood. Pupils learn about how to form positive relationships and to avoid unhealthy ones. They also learn about the importance of equality and tolerance. This helps pupils to be accepting of each other's differences and to treat other people with respect.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They said that although their workload is sometimes high, the school supports them well to manage it. The trust ensures that staff benefit from regular training. This helps them to fulfil their roles well.

Trust leaders have worked closely with the school to ensure that their shared vision for pupils' achievement is realised. This strong relationship has helped to maintain pupils' positive experiences at the school, despite recent changes in the school's staffing and leadership. Parents and carers hold the school in the highest regard. Many described the school's impact on pupils as transformational.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### What does the school need to do to improve?

#### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, staff do not use assessment strategies as effectively as they should. At times, they move on to new content before pupils have a secure grasp of their earlier learning. This means that gaps form in pupils' knowledge. The school should ensure that staff use assessment strategies consistently well to identify and address the knowledge that pupils lack.
- Some of the school's systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of its provision do not provide staff with useful information. At times, staff do not know how well the school's strategies are working. This includes strategies to improve attendance and how well staff deliver the intended curriculum. The school should monitor and evaluate improvement strategies, including improvements to the curriculum, to ensure that they have the intended positive impact.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 outstanding in June 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	141935
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire East
<b>Inspection number</b>	10290281
<b>Type of school</b>	Alternative provision
<b>School category</b>	Academy free school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	69
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Robert Halsall
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Nic Brindle
<b>Headteacher</b>	Helen Phillips (executive headteacher)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thefermainacademy.org">www.thefermainacademy.org</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	12 and 13 June 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is part of Youth Engagement Schools Trust, also known as the YES Trust.
- The school admits pupils at different times throughout the year. The school caters for pupils who have become disengaged from mainstream education. Most pupils are dual registered with a mainstream school. Some have been permanently excluded from other schools.
- The school provides some vocational aspects of its education at an additional site. This is located at Waterside House, Crossall Street, Macclesfield SK11 6XQ.
- The majority of the school's staff have been appointed since the last inspection. The executive headteacher took over the leadership of the school in April 2024.
- The school does not make use of any alternative providers.
- 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 spoke with the headteacher, other leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector met with members of the board of trustees, including the chair of the trust.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone. He also spoke with the headteachers of some of the mainstream schools that commission places at this school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school and their views of behaviour and bullying.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including leaders' improvement plans, minutes of trust and local support board meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- 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 considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. An inspector also met with a group of parents who wished to express their views in person.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.
- An inspector visited the school's additional site and considered the education that pupils receive there.

## Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stuart Perkins

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
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