

Inspection of Bardfield Academy

Clay Hill Road, Vange, Basildon, Essex SS16 4NL

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 June 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

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher is Donna Dry. This school is part of the South Essex 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 (CEO), Catherine Stalham, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Julie Mulcahy.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Bardfield Academy are kind and considerate. They are happy and proud to share examples of their work. Most pupils like to work hard and expand their knowledge, using different sources such as books and technology. They know how to use technology safely, including staying safe online.

Pupils respond well to the school's high expectations for behaviour. They listen carefully to adults and their peers. In lessons, pupils try their best. However, teachers do not check on pupils' understanding consistently well, so pupils do not get the right guidance to help them improve. Too many pupils have gaps in their learning. As a result, these pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils are keen to participate in groups that give them extra responsibilities. The digital leads and Spanish ambassadors learn valuable leadership skills as they help other pupils with their learning. The pupils in the school council have learned to support their peers with their well-being and they relish this important role. It teaches them to show compassion for others.

The school organises visitors who help pupils to be well prepared for their transition to secondary school. These include talks from the police and road safety experts. Pupils excitedly explain what they have learned from these visitors.

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

The trust has increased its support for the school this year, to improve achievement for pupils. In some subjects, most notably in the teaching of reading, improvements have been made. The school has also secured some improvements in attendance so that pupils are more often in school to learn. However, some changes are new and there is more to be done. Systems to spot what is working well or not and to rapidly make the right changes have not always been effective. As a result, the trust and school have not brought about some intended improvements, or these are recent.

The school's curriculum sets out what pupils need to know in each subject from Year 1 to Year 6. However, these plans do not link with the learning in the early years. Some children do not learn the knowledge they need to be well prepared to learn the Year 1 curriculum.

Teachers have the secure subject knowledge to explain new ideas clearly and provide pupils with practice to improve their knowledge. However, many pupils have gaps in their understanding due to the impact of COVID-19, past poor attendance and weaknesses in teaching and assessment. In most subjects, teachers check what pupils know. These checks are not precise and not all staff members spot and address misconceptions. As a result, pupils continue to make errors and their knowledge does not develop securely.

The school has recently strengthened the teaching of early reading. Staff have the right training to teach pupils to read well from the early years. Teachers regularly check pupils' reading and phonics knowledge. They give extra help to pupils who need it. The school has also introduced a new reading programme for older pupils. They benefit from the focus on understanding new vocabulary. However, some older pupils still need help to read fluently and do not learning the phonics they need to do so.

The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has increased. The school has developed bespoke support for pupils who need it to help them learn. Skilful staff provide carefully tailored lessons so that pupils with SEND can access the curriculum and make progress. However, some pupils with SEND still have too many gaps in their knowledge and need more help to catch up.

From the early years, pupils learn and follow the school rules. They enjoy well-organised breaktimes and play kindly together. Pupils show positive attitudes to their learning and want to do well. They are polite to each other and visitors, holding open doors and standing aside in corridors to let others pass by.

Pupils develop tolerance and compassion. They know it is important to listen carefully to others' opinions that may differ from their own. They learn about different religions and ways of life. Older pupils are mature and considerate, with a good understanding of life in modern Britain.

Staff benefit from the development opportunities they receive. The more recent training and monitoring of subjects, particularly in reading, have a positive impact on teaching. Staff appreciate the actions that leaders take to reduce their workload.

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, the curriculum plans for early years do not connect clearly to the curriculum for Year 1. This means that in these subjects, children do not always build their knowledge as securely as they could in readiness for their next stage of learning. The school must ensure that the subject-specific knowledge pupils need to know is identified in all subjects, starting in the early years.
- In some subjects, teachers' checks on pupils' understanding are not specific enough and staff do not readily address misconceptions. As a result, pupils continue with these misconceptions and do not achieve as well as they could. The school needs to ensure that teachers' checks on pupils' knowledge are precise and inform their teaching so that misconceptions are promptly rectified.

- Some older pupils are not fluent readers and have gaps in their phonics knowledge. These pupils have extra reading support, but this does not target and improve their phonics knowledge effectively. This means that they struggle to read new and unfamiliar words independently. The school needs to ensure that all pupils at the early stages of learning to read get effective help to meet their specific needs.
- The trust and school have not always had systems in place to robustly check the impact of all initiatives and changes made on pupils' education. Intended improvements have not been achieved or improvements are very recent. The school and trust should ensure that they evaluate fully the actions they take and make any adjustments needed to secure the improvements intended.

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	143203
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10345448
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	467
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Julie Mulcahy
CEO of trust	Catherine Stalham
Headteacher	Donna Dry
Website	www.bardfieldacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	9 May 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses one registered alternative provider of education.
- The school has a new leadership team since the previous inspection. The CEO of the trust took on the role in July 2023.
- The school runs a breakfast club for pupils.

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.

- 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, including attendance, that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors examined a range of documents provided by the school, including development plans and the school's self-evaluation form.
- The inspectors held meetings with headteacher, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and curriculum leaders.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the school committee board, including the chair and representatives from the trust.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history, computing and music. 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.
- The inspectors gathered further evidence about the quality of education in science, writing and design technology by meeting with leaders and looking at samples of pupils' work.
- Some inspectors talked to parents and carers at the school gate at the start of the school day.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. They also considered responses to the online staff survey. The inspectors also spoke to pupils to obtain their views.

Inspection team

Jessie Linsley, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Nicola Shadbolt	Ofsted Inspector
Ania Vaughan	Ofsted Inspector

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