

# Inspection of Columbus School and College

Oliver Way, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 4ZB

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Inspection dates: 26 and 27 June 2024

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The principal of this school is Mark Savage. This school is part of Academies Enterprise Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Rebecca Boomer-Clark, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Hall.

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 10 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. The school received an ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Act on 10 May 2023. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils love attending school. They thrive in the school's welcoming and inclusive ethos. Pupils join the school with considerable difficulties with speech and language. During their time at school, they develop strong communication skills and engage well with learning.

Starting in the early years, pupils delight in exploring the world through the well-considered learning activities at the school. Students in the sixth form demonstrate the best of what the school offers. They are self-assured and keen to learn. Students gain the knowledge and accreditation they need to be ready for their next steps as capable young adults.

Pupils understand the school's high expectations for their behaviour. They develop strong relationships with staff and other pupils. In social situations, pupils show confidence and care for others. They follow the daily routines and respond well to adults' guidance. Pupils receive high-quality pastoral support. When struggling to regulate behaviour or emotions, pupils work well with trusted staff who give them the assistance they need. This helps pupils to regain calm and return to learning.

Pupils value and benefit from the opportunities at school to take responsibility. The student council enthusiastically contribute their ideas about how to improve the school.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has been redesigning its curriculum. This work is not yet finished. Leaders and staff share a commitment to provide each pupil with a curriculum that meets their needs. Pupils follow well-planned pathways that combine academic ambition with support for their complex needs. For students in the sixth form, the school provides curriculum pathways that lead to appropriate accreditations to support their ambitions for the future.

Staff deliver the curriculum effectively. They check how well pupils are learning and provide timely support when pupils are not making suitable progress. Many areas of the curriculum are planned so that teachers provide opportunities for pupils to review what has previously been taught. When this happens, pupils learn what is intended. On occasion in some subjects, teachers do not know what knowledge must be reviewed to help pupils remember over time. As a result, teachers sometimes do not go back over previously taught material. When this is the case, pupils sometimes forget important knowledge.

The school provides staff specialist training and detailed information about each pupil's individual special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff use this guidance effectively to support pupils to learn well. Staff also provide the specific personal care and nurture pupils need.

The school places great importance on teaching pupils how to read. The school has put in place an effective approach to teaching pupils what they need to read fluently. Staff consistently follow the school's chosen approach to the teaching of early reading. They provide expert support that ensures pupils learn the knowledge they need to read effectively. For pupils with communication needs, staff effectively teach the skills and vocabulary needed to start learning phonics.

Staff effectively teach pupils how to behave well for learning and in social situations. In the early years, children learn how to sustain concentration and focus. They are well prepared for key stage 1. Pupils work hard in lessons and usually learn in calm, purposeful classrooms. Staff teach pupils ways to manage their emotions and behaviour. Pupils use these strategies well to maintain positive behaviour. When pupils' emotions or behaviour become dysregulated, staff provide effective support. This ensures pupils successfully return to learning.

The school ensures pupils learn about how to live safe, independent lives. The school provides trips for pupils and also visitors from the local community such as the police. Students in the sixth form are well supported to consider the many career prospects they can pursue. They benefit from personal careers advice along with transition events to help pupils think about their potential next steps. Pupils learn about the wider world beyond their own experiences. Pupils learn the importance of respecting others' differences.

Leaders have tried to reassure staff and parents about the changes needed to the school and the improvements made. There is more work to do. Many staff say that the changes made to the curriculum are starting to improve teachers' workload. However, some staff remain unsettled. Similarly, some parents remain unclear about the improvements made.

The trust has successfully supported the school since the previous inspection. They have provided the expertise and leadership capacity needed to improve the school's curriculum. Trust leaders effectively hold school leaders to account for the quality of the school's provision.

## **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 has not finished the programme of changes to the curriculum introduced 12 months ago. There are some areas where curriculum plans do not clarify which knowledge teachers must review over time. This means that teachers occasionally do not provide opportunities for pupils to revisit and build on what has previously been taught. As a result, pupils forget some key knowledge. The school must complete the improvements to the curriculum so

that teachers know which knowledge pupils must review and remember over time.

- Leaders' communication of the school's improvements has been partially successful. Some staff and parents remain uncertain about the progress the school has made. Leaders must continue to improve the way they reassure and engage with parents and staff.

## 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>	138122
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10323716
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	275
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	48
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	David Hall
<b>CEO</b>	Rebecca Boomer-Clark
<b>Principal</b>	Mark Savage
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.columbusschoolandcollege.org">www.columbusschoolandcollege.org</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	10 and 11 May 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is part of the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- The headteacher joined the school in May 2023.
- The school offers places for pupils aged between 3 and 19 years with complex needs, including severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education health and care (EHC) plan.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no children on roll in the school's nursery.
- The school does not use any 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

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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors conducted deep dives in the following subjects: communication and language, early reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education (PSHE), physical education (PE) and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons jointly with leaders, and spoke with teachers and other adults. They also spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including EHC plans, behaviour support plans and other information about the behaviour of pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with the chief executive trust of the trust, trust leaders, the principal, members of the senior leadership team, teachers, members of support staff and pupils and parents.
- 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.

## Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ruth Brock

Ofsted Inspector

Susan Sutton

Ofsted Inspector

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