

Inspection of UET Pathfinder Academy

Douglas Bader School, Filby Road, Badersfield, Norwich, Norfolk NR10 5JW

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 July 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

The executive headteacher of this school is Stephen Plume. This school is part of Unity Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Glyn Hambling, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alan Jones. There is also a head of specialist provision, Katrina Warren, who is responsible for this school and two others.

What is it like to attend this school?

This provision has changed significantly in recent years. The school now takes pupils for much longer periods than before. This has resulted in changes to the curriculum with the development of curriculum 'pathways'. However, what pupils should learn is not yet fully thought through. There is variability in how effective teaching is. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils have been without a school for a variety of reasons. The school expects them to work hard and achieve. Those pupils who attend regularly do this. Their written work demonstrates the progress they make. However, too many pupils are frequently absent and so do not access education.

Pupils who do attend regularly develop the confidence to participate in learning, often for the first time in a while. They learn how to behave and be good members of a school community. Some pupils successfully return to mainstream schools. Others stay in the school and gain nationally accredited qualifications, including GCSEs in mathematics, English, art, and other subjects.

Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Staff use the school's policy consistently when dealing with challenging behaviour. Pupils are clear about expectations. The calm reaction of staff when pupils are angry or upset helps most pupils quickly get back to learning.

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

The school has changed from all pupils staying for a short period to some staying for several years. The long-term curriculum for these pupils is not fully developed. In some subjects, it is unclear how pupils' learning develops over time. This means that pupils do not build on what they already know.

Teaching is not always effective. Some teachers are unsure how to build on what pupils have learned before. Some units of work, and how they are taught, cover learning in too little depth. Pupils complete multiple tasks rather than learning knowledge deeply. This means that some pupils do not have enough time to embed new learning before moving on. Some staff have expertise in curriculum design and delivery, but this is not shared well across sites.

Staff check pupils' prior knowledge and interests carefully when they join the school. Most staff ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can access the curriculum. However, staff's use of ongoing assessment to inform planning is too variable. This means that teaching is not always effective. This includes for pupils with SEND. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Primary pupils learn phonics daily. Staff encourage pupils to read. Their lessons are based around carefully chosen and high-quality books. However, the secondary staff

do not yet have the expertise to support weaker readers effectively. Reading is not promoted as well as it should be in the secondary phase.

Pupils who attend regularly develop ways to manage their behaviour and learn alongside others. The school uses suspensions appropriately for very serious incidents. However, some pupils receive frequent suspensions. This means they miss learning because their behaviour is not good enough.

Some pupils attend school regularly for the first time in many years. They are positive about their experiences of school, especially sessions such as cookery. Some pupils learn online, part time to help them re-engage in school. However, there are still too many pupils who have poor attendance. Some families have a negative view of the school. The school has recently appointed more pastoral staff to improve the relationship with families and increase pupils' attendance. This has not had time to make a difference.

Pupils learn how to be tolerant and respectful citizens. Their curriculum is enhanced by different experiences that spark pupils' interests, for example a beautician visiting to talk about careers. Some sites offer pupils trips to help build their confidence and engagement. Pupils have appropriate careers information, advice and guidance for their next steps in education, employment and training.

Trustees and senior leaders have steered the school through a period of considerable change in the six months following de-amalgamation of the former schools. This work has included making significant and ongoing changes and the appointment of skilled leaders to each school site. However, the professional development that staff receive has not yet resulted in pupils receiving a consistently high-quality education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The redesign of the curriculum is incomplete. It is not yet clear in the long-term what pupils should learn and in what order for all subjects. The school needs to ensure that the knowledge that pupils should learn, and the order they should learn it, is identified precisely in all subjects, to help pupils build their knowledge over time.
- There is variation in the effectiveness of teaching around the school. Some staff do not use assessment to adjust their teaching appropriately. As a result, some pupils do not always build effectively on their previous learning and secure the

knowledge they need to move on to new learning. The school needs to ensure that all teachers use assessment effectively to inform their planning and ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently well across subjects and key stages.

- Too many pupils miss time in school through absence and/or suspension. This means that they are not learning. The school needs to do further work to improve some pupils' attendance and behaviour.

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	140753
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10323741
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	350
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alan Jones
CEO of trust	Glyn Hambling
Headteacher	Stephen Plume (Executive headteacher)
Website	www.pathfinderschools.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, this school has de-amalgamated. Previously, there were nine sites that made up the school. Now there are five. This was done to focus the provision on the specific needs of pupils who attend. The other remaining four sites have reopened as a new school, UET Compass Academy. This took place in January 2024.
- The executive headteacher took up the role in September 2023.
- The school provides places for pupils who have either been permanently excluded from school or were missing from education and without a school. The majority of pupils have SEND.
- The school is part of the Unity Education Trust. The school transferred to the trust in January 2020.
- This school consists of five sites. Hooper Lane is used to assess pupils on entry and is occasionally used for the short-term education of pupils. Rosebery, Danby Wood and Douglas Bader provide provision for pupils in Years 1 to 11. Brooklands is for pupils in Years 1 to 6.

- Douglas Bader is the listed postal address for the school. The other sites are: UET Pathfinder Brooklands, Shrublands, Gorleston, Great Yarmouth, NR31 7BP; UET Pathfinder Danby Wood, Locksley Road, Norwich, NR4 6LG; UET Pathfinder Rosebery, Field Lane, Kings Lynn, PE30 4AY; UET Pathfinder Hooper Lane, 15 Hooper Lane, Norwich, NR3 4ED.
- Primary-age pupils all have full-time, on-site placements.
- Some secondary pupils learn remotely for some, or all, of the time. The remote curriculum is delivered face-to-face online and works towards accredited qualifications.
- Some pupils access 15 unregistered alternative providers.
- The local authority directly commissions all places in the school.
- 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.
- 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 the headteacher, the head of specialist provision and other school leaders. They met with the CEO and the chair of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including early reading), mathematics, art and design and humanities. For each subject, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors visited lessons in a range of other subjects and looked at a wide range of curriculum plans.
- 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted pupil, parent and staff surveys.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Becky Quinn

Ofsted Inspector

Sally Garrett

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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