

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Kempston Academy

Hill Rise, Kempston, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 7EB

Inspection dates:

15 and 16 October 2024

Outcome

Kempston Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Paul House. This school is part of the Chiltern Learning 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), Adrian Rogers, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Graham Pryor.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is an increasing sense of pride across the school community. The school's 'GROW' principles, including the focus on excellence and strong relationships, raise pupils' aspirations. Standards are getting better across most subjects. Final year sixth-form students get the specialist support that they need to complete their studies.

The school supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to build their confidence so that they can access the full curriculum. High expectations are realised in pupils' improved behaviour and in their work. The few pupils who struggle to behave well are supported to improve.

The school's inclusive culture is friendly and welcoming. Pupils feel safe in school. They are taught how to stay safe in the community. New pupils, including those who join later in the year, or arrive from different countries, settle in quickly. The school prioritises reading. Pupils' suggestions for new books are acted on. Those who need extra help with reading are supported to catch up.

The school's careers education programme ensures that pupils, including students in Year 13, get the guidance they need to make informed next-step choices. Consequently, they are well prepared to move on to the next stage in education, employment and/or training.

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

With the support of the trust, the school has acted swiftly to address a decline in standards, including in pupils' behaviour and attendance. Recently, the school has seen an increase in the number of pupils joining at different points in the year. Many of these enter in Years 10 and 11. Some pupils arrive with long periods of absence and disruption to their prior learning. This, coupled with previous curriculum weaknesses, resulted in Year 11 pupils' attainment in 2023 examinations falling below the national average.

The quality of education is now much improved. This is reflected in pupils' achievements overall, including in English and mathematics. The school has high expectations. Consequently, a greater number of pupils now study the full range of qualifications linked to the English Baccalaureate. Pupils' work is often of high quality.

The curriculum is ambitious and well thought out. Pupils revisit previous learning regularly, which means they remember more over time. Most teachers have strong subject knowledge. Curriculum leaders, including from the trust, step in to support non-specialist teachers when needed. Subject content is presented clearly. Teachers check for pupils' understanding frequently. Their feedback helps pupils to continue to improve. Occasionally, pupils have gaps in their knowledge that are not addressed quickly, so they do not learn as much as they could. This is because some activities are not consistently matched well to the precise content that pupils need to secure, including for a few pupils with SEND.

Overall, the provision for pupils with SEND ensures that needs are met. Pupils from the Aspen centre are supported to engage regularly in mainstream lessons. Those who need more time to build their confidence learn through bespoke programmes in smaller groups.

The school promotes the importance of reading well. It prioritises opportunities for pupils to read regularly. The library is a busy place. Increasingly, more pupils, including many more boys, borrow books to enjoy. The catch-up support for younger readers is well defined. Further refinements, including through the use of phonics, support older pupils who need to catch up with their reading.

Pupils' attendance has improved. Effective strategies, for example through careful analysis of pupils' progress, behaviour and safeguarding information, underpin these improvements. This includes for disadvantaged pupils and for pupils with SEND. Despite the school's best efforts, however, a minority of pupils still do not attend as often as they should.

A range of clubs and extra-curricular activities support pupils' wider development well. The regular whole school performances involve all Year groups, including the sixth form. British values thread through the curriculum and are at the core of the school's 'GROW' principles. The elected school council and eco-council act democratically to enhance the school's environment.

An effective balance of challenge and support from the trust and the local governing body ensures that pupils' outcomes continue to improve. Safeguarding responsibilities are well understood and managed. Staff benefit from the school's consideration of their workload and well-being. They appreciate leaders' visibility and 'open door'. Staff recognise the key role the trust and governors have in securing changes, including those that enhance teaching and learning. These include changes to the marking policy and the school's effective behaviour improvement strategies.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, pupils have gaps in their knowledge that are not always addressed quickly, including for a few pupils with SEND. This is because activities are not consistently matched well to the content some pupils need to learn to catch up. The school and the trust should ensure that staff are routinely consistent in using assessment information to target in-class interventions precisely.
- A few pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This means that they miss important personal development opportunities, as well as their academic studies. The school should build on the effective relationships established with families to address any remaining barriers, so that attendance for all pupil groups continues to improve.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 predecessor school, Kempston Challenger Academy, to be good for overall effectiveness in September 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	142387
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10318633
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	834
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	6
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Graham Pryor
CEO of the trust	Adrian Rogers
Headteacher	Paul House
Website	www.kempstonacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 September 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school became part of the Chiltern Learning Trust in May 2022.
- When the predecessor school, Kempston Challenger Academy, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good for overall effectiveness.
- The current headteacher joined the school April 2024.
- Entry to the school's sixth form was paused for September 2024.
- 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.
- The school uses three registered alternative provisions.

- The school's Aspen centre provides support for up to 20 pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. The local authority manages admissions to the centre. There are currently 14 pupils on roll from Year 7 to Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, including early career teachers, and support staff. They also spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors looked at safeguarding policies, the school's record of pre-employment checks on new staff and a sample of child protection files. They 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 lead inspector spoke with the CEO from the trust, a group of governors, including the chair of governors, the safeguarding governor and a link governor from the trust.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with the chief education officer from the local authority. She also had a telephone meeting with an alternative education provider working with the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, trust leaders, the designated safeguarding lead and other members of the safeguarding team. Inspectors held further meetings with the school's head of inclusion, who is also the special educational needs coordinator, and other leaders.
- The documents checked included behaviour logs, attendance records, minutes of governors' meetings and school policies.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Marc White	Ofsted Inspector

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