

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Appleton School

Croft Road, Benfleet, Essex SS7 5RN

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 November 2024

Outcome

The Appleton School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Sarah Cox. This school is part of Compass Education Trust Ltd, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Sarah Skinner, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ian Miller.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is a welcoming culture in this school. Staff develop positive relationships with pupils. They know the pupils very well. This ensures pupils are happy and feel safe here.

The school has high expectations for pupils. There is an ambitious curriculum for all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has recently implemented several strategies that support pupils to meet the aims of the curriculum. This ensures pupils achieve well and are ready for the next stage of their education.

Pupils behave well during lessons. The recently updated behaviour system is effective and applied consistently by staff. As a result, pupils are routinely focused and engaged. Pupils have various opportunities to contribute to the school community. The student leadership team plays a prominent role. Students in the sixth form enjoy the opportunity to help and support younger pupils.

Pupils take part in a variety of wider opportunities that develop their talents and interests. There is a range of clubs, including sports, music, and origami. Students in the sixth form take part in enrichment activities that help to prepare them well for adult life. These include cooking, first aid and academic writing.

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

The curriculum is designed to build pupils' knowledge progressively over time. National outcomes for pupils' achievement in 2023 were below the national averages. Consequently, the school put in place several strategies to raise the ambition and breadth of the curriculum. The school has focused on ensuring all pupils can successfully access the curriculum and retain the knowledge they have learned. Pupils with SEND are identified promptly and clear support strategies are put in place to help them. Staff make effective adaptations for pupils with SEND during lessons. Support staff work well with individuals. Consequently, pupils with SEND achieve well from their various starting points.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. They present information clearly. Sometimes, teachers do not identify and clarify pupils' misunderstandings. This means that, on occasion, pupils do not commit knowledge and subject-specific vocabulary to their long-term memory. Pupils routinely produce work of a high quality. Students in the sixth form develop a deep understanding of the subjects they study. This supports them to apply their skills independently.

The school swiftly identifies pupils who find reading a challenge. Staff determine pupils' individual needs and put in place effective, bespoke support. This helps pupils to make improvements to their reading fluency and confidence. Teachers are aware of pupils in their lessons who require support with reading. They make effective adaptations to assist these pupils.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Staff use the rewards system to recognise pupils' positive contributions. Pupils use these rewards to purchase books from a book vending machine. The school has put in place several measures to improve attendance. It works closely with parents to support pupils to attend school frequently. As a result, absences are reducing.

Pupils are taught to stay safe and healthy through a well-considered personal development provision. The programme builds on prior learning in an age-appropriate manner. This ensures pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. The school welcomes a range of external speakers, and pupils attend trips that broaden their interests and cultural understanding. These include outings to the theatre and a visiting mobile planetarium.

The school provides pupils with purposeful careers advice and guidance. Pupils take part in a range of activities, including careers fairs, mock interviews, and a variety of work-based opportunities. Students in the sixth form receive a great deal of support for future education and employment. This includes completing applications for university and apprenticeships. Students are prepared well for their next steps.

Leaders at all levels have identified the areas where the school needs to improve. They are working effectively to address them. Trustees and the governing body understand the

strengths and priorities of the school. They carry out their roles effectively. They have a clear strategic vision and provide appropriate challenge and support to the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- At times, teachers do not systematically identify and clarify pupils' misunderstandings or ensure that pupils are secure in subject-specific vocabulary. This means that, sometimes, pupils do not retain important key knowledge and understanding. The school should develop the expertise of all teachers so that they address any gaps in pupils' understanding promptly and ensure that learning and vocabulary are firmly embedded before moving on to new content.

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 to be 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 school to be good for overall effectiveness in February 2019.

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	136579
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10345306
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,575
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	165
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ian Miller
CEO of the trust	Sarah Skinner
Headteacher	Sarah Cox
Website	www.theappletonschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 February 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Compass Education Trust Ltd.
- The school uses three registered alternative provisions and one unregistered 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

- 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 met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team and a range of staff. They also met with the trust CEO, members of the board of trustees and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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 views of parents, pupils, and staff, including through responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Simon Conway, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Susan Sutton

Ofsted Inspector

Diana Fletcher

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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