

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Academy of Central Bedfordshire

Kingsland Campus, Parkside Drive, Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire LU5 5PX

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 December 2024

Outcome

The Academy of Central Bedfordshire has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Paul Green. This school is a single academy trust, The Academy of Central Bedfordshire, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The headteacher is the chief executive officer. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Stephen Gray.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend this school have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and often a previously disrupted education. They benefit from either fixed-term or permanent placements, carefully matched to their requirements. Through the care and expertise of staff, pupils soon successfully re-engage with learning. Pupils are positive about their experience here and the tailored support. As a result, they are able to reintegrate back into mainstream school or secure a place at college or work.

Pupils appreciate how staff support them academically to fill gaps in their knowledge. All pupils take GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics as well as other subjects. They also value the well-resourced vocational courses they can follow. This provides them with trade skills in, for example, catering, construction, vehicle maintenance, and hair and beauty.

Staff and pupils get on well. Pupils understand how they are expected to behave. They trust adults to help keep them safe. They access bespoke programmes to support their social and emotional needs. This rebuilds their independence and self-confidence. Pupils who need additional support to regulate are managed well. There are still occasions when pupils need reminders on how to behave. However, pupils respond well to earning 'recognition points' and going on reward trips, including a residential.

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

The school ensures that pupils meet their placement targets. It gets to know pupils' needs and interests from the outset. The school works effectively with parents and carers, commissioning schools and external professionals to set specific goals for each pupil. Pupils are then placed on appropriate academic and vocational qualification pathways. Leaders closely track how well pupils are achieving and engaging in learning. This means that any barriers to success are quickly identified and addressed. The school ensures that vocational subjects are of high quality and delivered by skilled staff.

The school has carefully designed its curriculum, so it can support pupils starting at different times in the year. It lays out clearly what knowledge needs to be learned and in what order. This means when a pupil starts, staff can spot gaps in pupils' knowledge with precision. In most instances, lessons are adapted well to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to catch up on this missed learning. This is evident in reading, for example, where pupils are ably supported to develop fluency, widen their vocabulary and gain confidence reading out loud.

Pupils participate well in most lessons, especially when the staff have captured their imagination or interest. Most pupils' work shows that they are engaging in their studies and achieving well. However, there are instances where this is not consistently the case. In these cases, the work pupils are set is either not ambitious enough or pupils are not getting the precise help they need to secure key knowledge.

Lessons are generally calm and orderly. Staff and pupils build positive relationships. Where any unwelcome behaviours do occur, the school takes appropriate action to resolve this. There has been a reduction in behaviour incidents due to staff consistently following the behaviour policy. Staff receive effective training on how to manage pupils' social and emotional needs. Pupils know that any bullying or discriminatory behaviour is not tolerated.

Pupils are supported to overcome any anxieties about returning to school. Their attendance improves. Pupils like the several school dogs and the social areas that they can use to reset.

Pupils know how to stay safe and understand the dangers of crime. They are prepared for adulthood as they learn about managing money and careers. They learn about healthy lifestyles and relationships and how to show respect. Pupils know adults will listen and act on their concerns.

Staff find working here rewarding. They appreciate the support leaders provide them with when needed. Trustees know the school well. Many trustees represent the schools that use this provision. They have a vested interest in how well the school performs and so hold leaders accountable for its success. The trustees also seek and action external advice. They engage well with the local authority and fulfil their statutory safeguarding duties.

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, there are inconsistencies in how well subject content is taught. This means in these subjects some pupils are not gaining the knowledge the curriculum intends and a few pupils therefore disengage. The school needs to ensure that effective pedagogical practice is shared so that all pupils access the same quality of provision and achieve well.
- There are some instances where work set for pupils is not ambitious enough, especially when these pupils are ready to learn. This can limit how highly these pupils can achieve. The school needs to ensure that the high expectations it has for pupils are demonstrated in the work set for them so they fully achieve what they are capable of.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in June 2015.

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	139411
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10345359
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	117
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Stephen Gray
CEO of the trust	Paul Green
Headteacher	Paul Green
Website	www.acb.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 July 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school has been a single-academy trust since 2013.
- It is based across two sites. The Kingsland site is based at Parkside Drive, Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire LU5 5PX. The other site is based at Church Road, Stotfold SG5 4NE.
- The headteacher oversees both schools and is supported by a head of school at each site.
- The school provides some places for pupils on behalf of the local authority following a permanent exclusion. It is also commissioned by local schools to provide alternative provision for their pupils, usually on a fixed-term basis.
- Most pupils who attend this school have SEND, predominantly for social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) and/or autism.
- The school currently uses five other external alternative providers.

- 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, both heads of school, assistant headteacher, senior teachers, special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with nine trustees, including the chair of trustees.
- The lead inspector had a meeting with the director of education from the local authority.
- The lead inspector spoke to leaders from three commissioning schools who have had pupils attend this school.
- The inspectors focused inspection activity on the following groups of subjects: English mathematics, science; and catering and motor vehicle engineering. For each group of subjects, the inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also reviewed documentation provided by the school, including the school development plan, its self-evaluation document and trustee minutes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector 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' interest first.
- Both inspectors spoke with several groups of pupils from all year groups and observed their behaviour in lessons and at lunchtime.
- The inspectors met with groups of staff and considered the opinions expressed through the staff survey.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments, and from talking to some parents on the telephone.

Inspection team

Sara Boyce, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Suzanne Thrower

Ofsted Inspector

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