

Inspection of Sir Frederick Gibberd College

Tendring Road, Harlow, Essex CM18 6RN

Inspection dates:	3 and 4 December 2024
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Dee Conlon. This school is part of BMAT Education, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Helena Mills CBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Drayton.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are highly resilient at this school. They have weathered the storm of learning in marquees and other schools. They are now settled learning together on one site in prefabricated buildings. Pupils appreciate staff's efforts to make such adjustments bearable. They know that staff have their well-being at heart.

For a range of reasons, including school closure, the delivery of the curriculum over time has not worked as well as it should. Sometimes pupils have had to learn the content of some subjects in the wrong order or omit certain topics due to the limitations of the physical environment. While the sequencing of the curriculum is back on track, some staff are not paying sufficient attention to what pupils already know and can do. This has led to some low expectations with pupils struggling to learn and manage their behaviour.

The sixth form has restarted with vigour. Even though student numbers are small, there is a broad and ambitious curriculum in place. Students enjoy supporting the younger pupils through their student leadership and mentoring roles. The school council enthusiastically supports the student leadership team to make their school a better place to be. Pupils benefit from an extensive extra-curricular offer and trips to enhance the curriculum.

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

The sixth-form curriculum and its delivery are working well. This was the case when the school first introduced this phase. At that time, students achieved well in their A-level results and most went on to higher education. The sixth form reopened in September 2024. Students benefit from expert teaching. They are gaining the foundational knowledge they need for study at this level.

In the main school, the quality of curriculum delivery is variable. Some staff are new to the school and the way in which the curriculum works. The school, with support from the trust, is providing training. Teachers are learning how to break content down so that pupils understand. The use of recall activities is helping pupils readily remember recent learning. Teachers are thinking carefully about the questions they ask to know how well pupils have secured knowledge. However, the information that teachers glean is not used well to adapt the curriculum for the differing needs of the pupils.

The trust has supported the school to strengthen its procedures for the identification of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The quality of the pupils' support plans is improving and there is more helpful guidance for staff. The school's expectations for SEND provision are in place in most classrooms, such as providing prompts for written responses. However, staff are inconsistent in their use of targeted strategies for the specific needs of pupils. This hampers some pupils' access to the curriculum.

The school's early reading programme is having limited impact. There has not been a smooth transition between the stopping of one phonics programme and the starting of another. The school has taken a long time to understand where gaps in pupils' phonics

knowledge lie. As a result, pupils who struggle with their reading have had little support during the autumn term. The school is using a range of strategies to promote reading. Pupils understand its importance for learning across the curriculum. Sixth-form students are avid readers who read widely for their studies.

The school's site is calm and orderly. This includes in lessons, where pupils' conduct is compliant. However, the school has not cultivated strong behaviours for learning where pupils make the right choices. The school's suspension rate has increased substantially, particularly for persistent disruptive behaviour. Some pupils are receiving repeat suspensions where strategies to improve their behaviour are not working. This affects pupils' progress through the curriculum, as, when they are suspended, these pupils are not attending school.

Programmes for pupils' personal development are well considered. Students in the sixth form experience a range of opportunities to help prepare them for adult life, including undertaking work placements that match their aspirations. Younger pupils benefit from employer engagement activities, but they have yet to receive independent careers information, advice and guidance. The trust is supporting the school to access this. Pupils are respectful of difference. They are confident in their understanding of protected characteristics and multiculturalism.

In some areas of the school's provision, efforts to bring about improvement are hampered. This is because the information that leaders gather to analyse and evaluate is partial or incomplete. This makes it difficult to see where strategic action is needed. While the local governing body asks questions to understand the school, it is not undertaking its role sufficiently to help the trust hold the school to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is inconsistency in how staff record concerns. On occasion, the chronology of actions taken is unclear. This was identified at the trust's most recent audit. There is an improvement plan in place to help the school address this area. That said, while the school's record-keeping is not as detailed as it should be, vulnerable pupils are kept safe. This is because the safeguarding team acts promptly on the information it is given. The team readily liaises with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families get the support they need.

There is an established safeguarding culture in the school. Staff know pupils well and are alert to the local risks that pupils face. Staff receive regular training and are up to date in their knowledge of government guidance. Pupils know how to stay safe when online. They receive age-appropriate advice about the use of social media and their digital footprint.

The trust ensures that the school makes the necessary pre-employment checks before it employs staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- At times, teachers do not use the information they have to adapt the curriculum effectively for the differing needs of the pupils. This means that some pupils do not progress through the curriculum as well as they should. The school should ensure staff consistently support the range of needs in their classes so that pupils achieve well.
- The school has been slow to implement suitable support for pupils who struggle to read. This means that some pupils do not have the reading expertise they need to access the curriculum. The school should quickly address this gap in its provision so those pupils who find reading difficult are given the support they need.
- The school is not taking effective action to reduce the number of suspensions. Pupils are not getting the support they need to alter their behaviour. As a result, some pupils receive repeat suspensions, and some escalate too quickly through the consequences system. The school should review its use of the behaviour policy and strengthen support so that pupils make the right decisions about their behaviour.
- Insufficiencies in record-keeping and the use of information are hampering the school's ability to see clearly where improvements are required. This is affecting its decision-making and subsequent actions. As a result, certain key areas have not improved. The trust should provide further training so leaders at all levels record, analyse, evaluate and use the information available to them effectively for school improvement.
- During the disruption to the school site, the local governing body lost focus on its monitoring role in other areas of the school's provision, such as the curriculum. This reduced how well it contributed to the trust's work to hold the school to account. The trust should revisit with governors their core responsibilities so they help the trust board hold the school to account effectively.

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	143697
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10295088
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
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	836
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	33
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Drayton
CEO of the trust	Helena Mills CBE
Headteacher	Dee Conlon
Website	www.sirfrederickgibberdcollege.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened as a free school in September 2019. It is part of BMAT Education multi-academy trust. The headteacher has been in post since the school opened.
- The school's new building was condemned after just two years of opening. The site was fully closed to pupils for 19 days in the academic year 2023/24. Due to the closure of the school building, the sixth form was disbanded and Year 7 pupils were taught at another school. Pupils in Years 8 to 11 spent eight months learning in marquees. Since May 2024, pupils are back on the school's site and are now learning in prefabricated buildings. The sixth form restarted in September 2024.
- The school uses 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- 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 chair of the trust, the CEO, trust leaders, the chair of the local governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders and staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects, including personal, social and health education.
- 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 responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text comments. They took account of the responses to the confidential staff and pupil surveys and gathered the views of staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector
Diana Fletcher	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Sutton	Ofsted Inspector
Jess Pearce	Ofsted Inspector

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