

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Pioneer House High School

200 Yewtree Lane, Northern Moor, Manchester M23 0FF

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 January 2025

Outcome

Pioneer House High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Adele Cox. This school is part of the Prospere 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), Linda Jones, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jenny Andrews. Linda Jones is also the executive headteacher for this school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, thrive and excel as part of this nurturing and highly aspirational school. Many pupils who join the school have previously struggled in a mainstream school environment. For these pupils and their families, Pioneer House is transformative. Staff provide extensive support and care so that pupils feel safe and accepted. Pupils flourish socially as well as academically.

The school is relentlessly ambitious for all pupils. The unique curriculum is designed thoughtfully to support and celebrate each step of pupils' learning, however small or large. Pupils rise to meet the school's high expectations. They achieve exceptionally well.

Pupils are tolerant and supportive of each other. They appreciate the clear routines and the rewards that the school sets out for their behaviour. Staff know pupils as individuals. They use highly personalised support strategies skilfully. These help pupils to communicate their needs and regulate their own behaviour.

The school's central focus is to prepare pupils for adulthood and life beyond school. Pupils benefit from an extensive programme of lessons, activities and work experiences tailored to their specific personal development needs. This equips pupils with the skills that they

require to keep themselves safe and healthy, communicate effectively and live their lives as independently as possible.

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

The school has meticulously designed a specialist curriculum that caters exceptionally well for pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). At key stage 3, all pupils study a broad and balanced range of subjects. There is a strong focus on pupils' engagement, communication and sensory needs. This prepares pupils particularly well for the specialist pathways and opportunities that are provided in key stages 4 and 5. Pupils study accredited courses in literacy and numeracy, as well as a wide range of vocational qualifications, supplemented with tailored work experiences.

In each subject, the school has thoughtfully identified and ordered the knowledge and skills that pupils should learn. These are broken down with precision, so that routes for progression are in place for pupils to build on their prior learning at their own pace.

Teachers and staff have strong subject knowledge and a detailed understanding of pupils' SEND. They use this knowledge to adapt the delivery of the curriculum expertly. Teachers use the school's assessment strategies effectively to continually identify and address any gaps in pupils' knowledge. Pupils make strong progress through the curriculum from a range of different starting points.

The trust and the school provide teachers and staff with strong induction, support and ongoing training. This ensures that staff can balance their workload and develop their professional expertise continually for the benefit of pupils.

The school prioritises reading and oracy. On entry to the school, gaps in pupils' reading knowledge are assessed. Pupils receive focused and regular support to address these gaps, including phonics lessons. This ensures that pupils can read and communicate with increasing fluency and confidence. This also helps to reduce some of the social and emotional barriers that some pupils face due to their needs.

The school environment is calm and purposeful. Pupils are polite towards each other. They understand and respect difference and diversity. Pupils develop strong interpersonal skills and, as they mature, are supported to apply them with impressive confidence in a range of social situations.

The school provides an exceptional programme of opportunities to promote pupils' personal development, regardless of their specific needs. There are no barriers or limits. A 'can do' approach ensures that pupils develop their levels of resilience and independence in preparation for life within and beyond school. For example, pupils take part in residential trips and outdoor activities, including The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. They receive enhanced lessons and workshops to develop their understanding of healthy lifestyles, online safety and life skills, such as travelling on public transport.

At all stages, pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps in education and employment. There is a comprehensive and specialised careers advice and guidance programme. For example, the school has set up its own community café as a social enterprise so that it can provide work experience for pupils on site and develop their employability skills. All pupils progress to positive destinations when they leave the school.

The trust provides the school with highly effective support and challenge. Together with a local governing body, it sets an ambitious vision and works closely with the school to ensure that the quality of education that pupils receive is continually improving.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 outstanding 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 outstanding for overall effectiveness in May 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	142893
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	10348332
Type of school	Special
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	156
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jenny Andrews
CEO of the trust	Linda Jones
Headteacher	Adele Cox
Website	www.pioneerhousehighschool.net
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 May 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Prospere Learning Trust.
- The school caters for pupils with SEND. All of the pupils have education, health and care plans. All of the pupils have significant learning difficulties.
- The school does not use any 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.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the trust board, including the chair. She also met with the chair of the local governing body.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO of the trust, who is also the executive headteacher of the school.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. They met with a range of staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. Inspectors met with a range of pupils from different year groups to gather their views about school life. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school.
- 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.

Inspection team

Amanda Downing, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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