Inspection of Eaton Bank Academy

Jackson Road, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 1NT

Inspection dates:	25 and 26 February 2025
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Sixth-form provision	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Edward O'Neill. This school is part of the Halliard 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), Jeremy Spencer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mike Gorton.

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils at Eaton Bank Academy benefit from a high-quality education. They rise to the school's high expectations for their achievement, proudly demonstrating the school's values of ambition and optimism. Typically, pupils are eager learners. Students in the sixth form demonstrate growing independence, for example they make purposeful use of self-guided study time.

Pupils treat each other kindly. They interact politely with staff. This positive behaviour reflects the respectful culture in the school. Pupils' successes, such as their accomplishments in sport and the arts, are widely celebrated. Student leaders in the sixth form serve as positive role models to younger pupils, for example by listening to them read and by leading assemblies.

Pupils know how to seek help if they are worried about anything. This helps them to feel happy and safe at school. When pupils report bullying, the school deals with it effectively so that it rarely recurs.

Many pupils value the wide range of experiences that the school provides. For example, pupils in Year 7 build their confidence by taking part in a bushcraft residential, while older students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

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

The trust has helped the school to raise its aspirations for what pupils can achieve. Pupils and students in the sixth form study a broad, rich curriculum that reflects the trust's ambitious vision. The curriculum is meticulously designed to help pupils build a firm foundation of knowledge in key stages 3 and 4. This enables pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to move on successfully to demanding sixth-form courses.

Most pupils attend school often. This is particularly true of students in the sixth form. Those pupils who attend regularly benefit the most from the school's high-quality curriculum. They typically achieve well in national examinations. In contrast, the poor attendance of a small group of disadvantaged pupils had a negative impact on recently published key stage 4 outcomes. The trust has helped the school to renew its focus on attendance. Although some disadvantaged pupils still miss school more frequently than their peers, work to support these pupils is successful. Rates of attendance are rising sharply as a result.

The trust has also prioritised the development of teachers' subject knowledge. This has been a key factor in ensuring that pupils learn from teachers with the right subject expertise. Added to this, the school has developed consistent approaches to teaching and checks on pupils' understanding. Teachers in most subjects use these strategies routinely to promote effective learning. However, in a few subjects, teachers' understanding of how to identify and then address any misconceptions is underdeveloped. This means that, at

times, some pupils do not embed their knowledge of these subjects as securely as they could.

The school is quick to spot when pupils struggle with their learning. This includes pupils who find reading difficult, as well as those with SEND. There are rigorous systems to identify these pupils' needs. Most pupils with SEND receive effective support. This typically helps them to succeed in the classroom. Well-trained staff provide extra help for the small number of pupils who need it. For example, carefully targeted interventions enable weaker readers to catch up with their peers.

The school's work to promote a culture of positive conduct has been successful. Staff apply the renewed behaviour policy fairly. Pupils are punctual to lessons and manage themselves sensibly. They understand the routines and expectations that the school has introduced. Overall, this helps to create a calm environment for learning that pupils value. Incidents of poor behaviour, including those resulting in suspension, have markedly reduced in recent months.

There is a comprehensive programme in place to support pupils' personal development. Many parts of this programme, such as the curriculum for relationships and sex education, are well established. Pupils learn important information about consent, healthy relationships and how to keep themselves safe. Students in the sixth form continue to build their knowledge in an age-appropriate way. This, alongside strong careers advice and guidance, helps to prepare them well for adulthood.

Some other aspects of the school's personal development programme are less effective. This includes the school's approach to anti-bullying education. A minority of pupils have perceptions about bullying in the school that do not align with most pupils' experiences. These misconceptions sometimes lead pupils to believe that the school will not take action if they report discriminatory language. This is not the case. The school is working with these pupils, and their parents and carers, to renew their confidence in the school's processes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, teachers do not make effective use of the school's chosen assessment strategies to identify pupils' misconceptions. This means that some pupils do not learn the curriculum in these subjects as securely as they could. The school should ensure that staff are fully equipped to identify and remedy pupils' misconceptions so that they can learn successfully in these subjects.

- Some disadvantaged pupils have had irregular attendance in the past. Others still do not attend school as often as they should. Over time, this has created gaps in these pupils' knowledge and hindered their achievement across the curriculum. The school should boost its efforts to help these pupils to attend school more often. It should also ensure that staff use effective strategies to address these pupils' missed learning.
- The school's personal development programme has not successfully addressed some pupils' misconceptions about bullying. A minority of pupils are not confident that the school will deal with bullying and discrimination effectively. This means that they are reluctant to speak out when these problems occur. The school should strengthen its approach to anti-bullying education so that pupils' worries are allayed.

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	138662
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10348271
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1,069
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	151
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mike Gorton
CEO of the trust	Jeremy Spencer
Headteacher	Edward O'Neill
Website	www.eatonbankacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	3 April 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school joined the Fallibroome Trust in September 2019. The trust changed its name in January 2025. It is now called the Halliard Trust.
- Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils on the school roll has grown considerably.
- The school makes use of one registered and one unregistered alternative provision for a very small number of pupils.
- 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 (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 spoke with the headteacher, the CEO of the trust, other leaders and staff. The lead inspector met with a group of trustees, including the chair of the trust. He also met with the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, geography, art and design, and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils and students about their experiences at school and their views of behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document, leaders' improvement plans, minutes of governance meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- 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 Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils and for staff, and some parental comments that were shared directly with inspectors during the inspection.

Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector

Stephen Ruddy	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Washbourne	His Majesty's Inspector

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