

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Etonbury Academy

Stotfold Road, Arlesey, Bedfordshire SG15 6XS

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 April 2025

Outcome

Etonbury Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The principal of this school is Joanne Young. This school is part of Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST), which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Alan Lee, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ilona Bond.

What is it like to attend this school?

Etonbury Academy is a welcoming and nurturing place to learn. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attend regularly. They value the warm, supportive relationships they build with staff. This helps them to feel safe, cared for and known as individuals. Pupils behave with great courtesy and respect. They hold doors open, listen carefully to each other in conversations and demonstrate consistently high levels of kindness towards others.

In lessons, pupils work hard and focus well. Teachers have high expectations and pupils rise to meet them. Pupils appreciate the strong academic and pastoral support they receive, both in lessons and through lunchtime and after-school sessions. Staff apply the school's expectations for behaviour consistently and fairly. As a result, classrooms and corridors are calm, orderly and purposeful. This creates an environment where pupils can learn without disruption.

Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging to the school community. They take pride in contributing both within and beyond the school. For example, pupils lead charity events, including sponsored runs and organising the 'Juniors' Valentine's disco'. Older pupils support younger ones with their learning and well-being. The 'pupil voice team' plays an active leadership role, working closely with staff to help shape improvements to the school.

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

Across all key stages, leaders have established an ambitious curriculum that teaches pupils the skills and knowledge they need to achieve well. Key stage 4 results are consistently strong. However, published outcomes for key stage 2 have been lower than national averages in recent years. The school has taken robust action to address this. As a result, pupils achieve well across all year groups.

Teachers deliver the curriculum well, including in the newly opened sixth form where students receive strong support to study a range of A-Level courses. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge. They explain new information clearly and break down learning into manageable steps. Staff accurately identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They provide strategies that help pupils, including those with SEND, to access the curriculum and achieve well.

In most subjects, teachers check pupils' understanding regularly. They use a range of strategies to extend pupils' thinking, such as precise questioning and clear modelling. Teachers often adapt learning skilfully to help pupils access the curriculum. For example, they provide well-designed writing frames, word banks and targeted one-to-one support where needed.

However, sometimes teachers do not identify gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills with enough precision. On occasion, they do not deepen and extend some pupils' learning. When this happens, pupils develop misunderstandings or complete tasks that are not matched closely enough to what they already know. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The school recognises this and is taking steps to ensure that learning is consistently matched to pupils' starting points.

Leaders prioritise reading across the school. Pupils enjoy a wide range of interesting books and speak positively about their reading experiences. Staff quickly spot pupils who struggle to read and provide targeted support to help them become fluent and confident readers.

Pupils' conduct in school is often excellent. They listen attentively in lessons and focus well on their learning. Pupils value the warm and caring relationships they share with staff. They behave thoughtfully, which helps to create a calm and positive learning environment. Some pupils join the school at non-typical points, such as mid-year. Most pupils settle quickly. When pupils find it harder to meet expectations, staff provide swift and effective support to help them succeed.

The school offers an extensive and well-planned programme to develop pupils' character and prepare them for life in modern Britain. Pupils show high levels of respect for others, including those from different backgrounds. They benefit from a wide range of opportunities to develop their interests and skills. Many build their critical thinking and confidence through opportunities, such as debating club. Pupils also enjoy popular sports clubs, such as netball and rounders, as well as activities like chess, gardening and coding.

club. They value the careers advice they receive and have a strong understanding of the opportunities available to them.

Leaders, trustees and governors know the school well. They take effective action to maintain high standards for pupils. Staff, parents and carers are highly positive of the school and appreciate the quality of education and support it provides.

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 cases, teachers do not always check what pupils know or can do with sufficient precision, or in a timely manner. As a result, gaps in pupils' understanding are not always identified and addressed effectively. The school should ensure that teachers systematically check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching accordingly.
- At times, the work set for pupils is not sufficiently well matched to their prior knowledge or level of understanding. In some cases, tasks are not adapted well enough to enable all pupils to access and engage fully with learning. The school should ensure that staff are consistently supported to adapt learning to meet pupils' starting points and needs.

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 2020.

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	137632
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10379969
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,109
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	121
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ilona Bond
CEO of the trust	Alan Lee
Principal	Joanne Young
Website	www.etonbury.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 February 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, a new principal has been appointed.
- The school opened a sixth form in September 2023.
- The school admits pupils from Year 5 to Year 13.
- 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.
- The school uses one registered and two unregistered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with trust staff, including the CEO of the trust. They also met with the principal, vice-principal and senior staff, including those with responsibility for pupils with safeguarding and SEND.
- Inspector met with trustees and governors, including the vice-chair of trustees and the chair of governors.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to the following: school improvement and governance; behaviour and attendance; alternative provision; enrichment; and pupils with SEND. They also held meetings with staff with responsibilities in these areas.
- 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 online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. They also spoke to groups of pupils and took into consideration the online staff surveys.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tom Sparks

Ofsted Inspector

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