

Inspection of Essa Primary Academy

Lever Edge Lane, Bolton, Lancashire BL3 3HH

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 November 2024

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The principal of this school is Peter Stewart. This school is part of Northern Education 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), Rob Tarn, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mark Sanders.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have positive relationships with their teachers and staff, which they value. Pupils are respectful towards each other. They enjoy learning about the diverse world around them. For example, they enthusiastically told inspectors about the different cultures and backgrounds of others they learn about in their lessons and through the books that they read.

The school has raised its ambitions for what pupils should learn and achieve. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Many pupils, including children in the early years, now achieve well across most curriculum subjects. Pupils rise to the school's high expectations for behaviour. Pupils conduct themselves sensibly and get along with each other well. Fall outs are rare. Pupils are happy and safe at this school.

Pupils have increasingly benefited from the refreshed extra-curricular clubs available to them. More pupils are starting to join these clubs, which range from sports clubs to sewing and art club. Older pupils appreciate the opportunity that they now have to experience a residential visit. Pupil councillors are proud of their roles, while other pupils had recently commenced their training to become play leaders.

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

The school has recently emerged from a period of turbulence that had caused a decline in standards since the last inspection. However, the school has taken rapid and effective actions to address many of the issues that had negatively impacted the quality of education that pupils received. For example, the school has successfully overhauled many of its subject curriculums. These curriculums are now ambitious and well-designed, including from the early years. They are typically delivered well by staff. Such improvements have helped more pupils to attain the expected standards in national end of key stage assessments.

The school has put early reading front and centre of its curriculum improvement work. This has paid dividends. The school now delivers its phonics programme consistently well. It provides pupils with books that are well suited to their stage of learning to read. When pupils need extra help with their phonics learning, the school acts quickly to provide them with intensive, highly individualised extra support. The number of pupils that meet the standard of the phonics screening check in Year 1 has increased. Many pupils quickly become confident, fluent readers.

Pupils develop a love of reading. They read a range of high-quality stories that help them to deepen their understanding of the world.

A small number of curriculum subjects are still in the process of being redeveloped. At times, the school does not deliver these subjects consistently well. In these subjects, the school does not ensure that all teachers have clear enough guidance on how to design suitable learning activities that give due consideration to knowledge gaps that some pupils

still have. Consequently, some pupils do not develop a secure body of knowledge in these few subjects and some knowledge gaps remain.

The school has made many improvements to its subject leadership capacity. Some subjects are now led particularly well. However, the school is still developing the quality of the checks that it makes on the curriculum. This is not as sharp in some subjects as it is in others. This means that some inconsistencies in curriculum delivery are not picked up and dealt with by the school as swiftly as they could be.

Regular checks are undertaken to establish what pupils know and remember. With increasing effectiveness, the school uses these checks to provide timely support to help pupils address their misconceptions.

Recently redesigned systems identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) more effectively. Overall, many pupils with SEND achieve well. However, the school is still working to develop its strategies to support some pupils with SEND and some who are new to learning the English language. Consequently, some of these pupils do not achieve as well as they otherwise could.

The school has thought carefully about how it provides for pupils' personal development. It promotes diversity and difference well through the curriculum. It ensures that pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils know about the signs of peer pressure and how to deal with these situations appropriately. Pupils have a clear understanding of how to look after their physical and mental health. They access an increasing range of wider experiences, such as visits to different places of worship. They are being prepared well for life in modern Britain.

The school does all that it reasonably can to ensure that attendance is a high priority for everybody. Most pupils attend school regularly.

Children in the early years quickly rise to the school's high expectations for behaviour and settle into classroom routines. Older pupils conduct themselves impeccably when moving around the school. They rarely cause disruptions to classroom learning. Most pupils are attentive and enjoy their lessons.

Trustees and others who are responsible for governance provide effective challenge and support. They fulfil their statutory duties well. Leaders ensure that staff are happy and feel supported. Staff spoke positively about how changes in marking expectations and improved curriculum guidance have helped to reduce their workload.

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 small number of subjects, the school does not design effective learning activities that take account of what pupils currently know and remember. At times, this means that pupils do not address some gaps in their knowledge and do not develop a secure understanding of some new learning. The school should complete its curriculum redevelopment work and provide staff with robust guidance on how best to deliver its curriculum content in these subjects.
- At times, the school does not provide effective support to some pupils with additional needs, such as pupils with SEND and those who speak English as an additional language. This sometimes means that these pupils do not access their learning as effectively as they otherwise could. The school should ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills to cater for the different additional needs of these pupils so that they can achieve the best possible outcomes.
- In some subjects, the school is still developing its subject leadership capacity and curriculum oversight. This means that the school does not address some issues with the delivery of some subjects as quickly as it could. The school should ensure that subject leaders have the expertise needed to oversee their subjects consistently well.

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 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	140973
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10348304
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	398
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Sanders
CEO of the trust	Rob Tarn
Principal	Peter Stewart
Website	esp.northerneducationtrust.org
Dates of previous inspection	29 and 30 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Earlier this year, the school joined Northern Education Trust. The school was previously part of Essa Foundation Academies Trust.
- There have been a number of changes in leaders and staff since the last inspection. For example, there is a new principal, vice-principal and CEO.
- The school has high levels of pupil mobility. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is much higher than the national average.
- The school operates a before-school club.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school has recently set up a small specially resourced provision called The Bridge. At present, this provision caters for a very small number of pupils with complex SEND.

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 that 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 conducted deep dives in these subjects: art and design, early reading, history, mathematics and science. They met with subject leaders and teachers. They visited lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work and talked with groups of pupils about their learning. The lead inspector observed pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum, spoke with pupils about their learning and evaluated their work in some other subjects.
- Inspectors talked to staff about their workload and well-being.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the board of trustees and others who are also responsible for governance.
- The lead inspector spoke with a designate of the CEO.
- Inspectors met with the leaders who are responsible for attendance, behaviour and pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their wider experience of school.
- Inspectors looked at a range of policies and documents related to pupils' welfare and education. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the 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.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.
- Inspectors met with parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

David Spruce, lead inspector

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