

Inspection of The Harleston Sancroft Academy (a 3-16 Church of England School)

Wilderness Lane, Harleston, Norfolk IP20 9DD

Inspection dates:	24 and 25 June 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Rob Connelly. This school is part of The Diocese of Norwich St Benet's Multi-Academy 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), Sam Nixon, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Fred Corbett.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils relish opportunities to 'live life in all its fullness'. From Nursery to Year 11, they know staff listen to and care for them. Children in early years settle quickly into calm, purposeful routines, while older pupils speak confidently about the support they receive from trusted staff. This enables pupils to feel happy and safe.

The school has set high expectations for pupils' achievement through the curriculum and the quality of training to develop staff. This ambition is realised well in most areas of the school. In the past, pupils have not achieved as well as they should have by the end of Year 6. The school has taken effective action to address this and close gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Behaviour is calm and respectful. Pupils understand the rules and routines and follow them well. They show kindness to one another and respond positively to staff guidance. When issues arise, staff act quickly and fairly.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of enrichment opportunities. They grow vegetables in the early years garden, perform in town parades and take part in 'Tots to Teens', where older pupils support younger children. These experiences help pupils develop confidence, empathy and a strong sense of community.

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

The school has developed an all-through curriculum that is both broad and ambitious. It has carefully designed how knowledge should build and connect from early years to Year 11. For example, in early years, children explore the local areas to learn about the world around them. This progresses to overnight residential trips in the primary phase and then to visits abroad in secondary to deepen pupils' understanding of the curriculum and the wider world.

The trust has supported the school in establishing a consistent set of teaching principles, around preparation, ambition and connection. Staff use these principles to explain new ideas clearly to pupils. Staff give pupils suitable opportunities to practise and discuss important knowledge. This typically enables pupils to embed knowledge well. However, on occasions, staff do not check pupils' understanding with sufficient precision. As a result, some pupils retain misconceptions or have gaps in their knowledge. This hinders their ability to build securely on prior learning.

The school prioritises reading. From Nursery onwards, pupils benefit from a wealth of opportunities to develop speech, language and communication through rhyme, song and interactions. Staff have been trained effectively in how to teach phonics well. They make careful adaptations to enable pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to access phonics teaching successfully. Pupils who fall behind receive timely and targeted support. This all supports pupils to learn to read well. As they move through the school, pupils encounter a wide range of high-quality texts and develop increasingly complex comprehension skills. For example, secondary pupils can talk confidently about character motivations and plot in Shakespearean texts. Initiatives such as the 'Harleston

Hundred' books and 'Reading Cafés' promote reading for pleasure well, particularly in the primary phase.

The school is developing a whole-school approach to teaching writing, to improve how well writing is taught. This is bearing fruit. However, as the approach is still in its early stages, there remains too much variation in the quality of pupils' writing across the curriculum. This inconsistency limits some pupils' ability to express their ideas clearly and achieve as well as they might across subjects.

Children in early years benefit from a deep and engaging curriculum. This supports all areas of early learning exceptionally well. Staff precisely tailor activities to individual needs and form caring relationships with children. Learning areas are calm and purposeful, with very high levels of engagement and independence from children in learning activities. Children explore ideas through play, storytelling and real-life experiences, such as cooking, gardening and community events. These all build exceptional depth to children's knowledge. For example, children can confidently apply rich vocabulary, such as how metamorphosis relates to their hungry caterpillar story.

Staff identify needs early and work closely with families to design appropriate support for pupils with SEND. Within both enhanced provision classes and others, pupils access a full curriculum with well-considered adaptations. Pupils with SEND are included in all aspects of school life.

Behaviour across the school is calm and respectful. Pupils understand expectations and follow routines well. From the early years, children show high levels of self-control and cooperation. In the secondary phase, pupils especially value the school's clear systems and strong pastoral care. Where any issues do occur, staff respond with care and consistency. The school's approach 'connect before we correct', reflects its values-led ethos and focus on building relationships.

Personal development is promoted well. Pupils take on meaningful leadership roles, such as well-being ambassadors, diversity crew and junior librarians. They act as playground well-being monitors, helping younger pupils resolve minor disputes and encouraging inclusive play. Pupils learn about healthy relationships, online safety and mental health. They participate in a wide range of enrichment activities, including sports, music, drama and community events. This all builds pupils' social and cultural understanding. In the secondary phase, pupils receive a suitable, planned programme of careers education. However, the detail of subject-specific guidance pupils receive is not always comprehensive enough.

Leaders at all levels have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have taken deliberate, long-term action to address historical weaknesses, particularly in the primary phase. The trust provides strong strategic oversight of the school. Trust leaders assure themselves that systems are working as intended. Governors and trustees are well informed and actively involved in checking on the school's progress. They challenge and support leaders robustly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Expectations of how writing should be taught are not consistently understood or applied by staff. As a result, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their writing across a range of subject-specific contexts well. This leads to too much variation in the quality of pupils' written work across the curriculum. The school should ensure that its whole-school approach to teaching writing is consistently applied, so that pupils are supported to produce high-quality writing.
- On occasions, teachers do not check pupils' understanding well enough. This means that pupils' misconceptions or gaps in knowledge are not always addressed as well as they could be. The school should ensure that staff diligently check pupils' understanding, both in lessons and through the quality of their work, so misconceptions can be quickly and effectively addressed.

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	149197
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10378603
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	849
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Fred Corbett
CEO of the trust	Sam Nixon
Headteacher	Rob Connelly
Website	www.sancroft.stbenets.org
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school opened as a new all-through school on 1 September 2022.
- Although the headteacher, Rob Connelly, has overall responsibility across all phases, there is also a head of school for the Primary phase, Jane Price.
- 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.
- ☐ The lead inspector met with representatives from the trust board and local governing body, including the chair. The lead inspector also met with representatives from the diocese and trust, including the CEO.
- ☐ Inspectors met with the headteacher, the head of school, senior leaders and other staff members.
- ☐ Inspectors conducted further meetings with staff regarding safeguarding, special educational needs provision, early years, behaviour, attendance, careers and personal development.
- ☐ Inspectors visited the school's 'enhanced' SEND provision.
- ☐ Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, early reading, mathematics, art and design, history and geography. 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 other subjects within the curriculum. This included science.
- ☐ Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times.
- ☐ 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 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and Ofsted's staff survey. They considered responses to the confidential online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

Inspection team

James Chester, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Russell Ayling	Ofsted Inspector
Jonathan Rockey	Ofsted Inspector
Imran Khan	Ofsted Inspector

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