

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The North School

Essella Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 8AL

Inspection dates:

12 and 13 November 2024

Outcome

The North School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Clair Ellerby. This school is part of the Swale Academies 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), Michael Wilson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Goodson. There is also a director of secondary, Suzanne Dickinson, who is responsible for this school and eight others.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a welcoming school that encourages pupils to take responsibility and develop resilience. For example, pupils in the young farmers' club each raise an animal over a year in readiness to present it at a regional show, which requires skill and commitment.

Pupils are well supported to learn an interesting and broad curriculum successfully. The school has high ambition for its pupils. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who attend the school's specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND.

The school has high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Classrooms are typically calm and orderly. In the sixth form, lessons are highly purposeful. Students work hard and with independence. Where disruption occurs, the school addresses it promptly to ensure that any impact on pupils' learning is limited. Bullying is not commonplace and is typically well dealt with where it does happen.

The school provides pupils with a wide choice of clubs, which broaden their experiences. For example, pupils compete as part of popular basketball and tennis academies. Educational visits extend pupils' learning. For example, Year 10 pupils develop their geography fieldwork skills on a range of visits to urban and rural locations.

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

The school has made some recent changes to the curriculum to make it more ambitious for pupils. Pupils learn content in a logical order. For example, pupils in Year 9 learn about conventional male and female roles in Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'. This supports Year 10 pupils to understand why Lady Macbeth in 'Macbeth' is an unconventional female character.

The school checks that pupils across the curriculum are benefiting from the changes it has introduced. This includes pupils with SEND and pupils in the specially resourced provision. Pupils typically develop detailed knowledge across the curriculum. They recall prior learning with interest and accuracy, including in the sixth form. However, curriculum changes are recent. Pupils who left the school in 2023 did not have long enough to benefit from these changes in some subjects. As a result, published outcomes in national assessments do not reflect these changes.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They present information clearly to pupils. Revisiting ensures that pupils remember important ideas well. Teachers check that pupils have understood key content. This is especially effective in the sixth form. Teachers check students' knowledge rigorously and provide them with precisely focused feedback. The school regularly teaches pupils ambitious vocabulary. However, teachers do not check as carefully that pupils can use new and ambitious language in their spoken and written work. As a result, pupils' work is sometimes of a lower quality than the school intends.

The school identifies the needs of pupils with SEND well. Staff adapt resources and approaches. This supports pupils with SEND to learn the curriculum well, including pupils in the specially resourced provision. Teachers support pupils to read and write with fluency and accuracy. The school identifies pupils at the earlier stages of reading and writing and helps them to catch up.

Teachers promote effective discussions in the classroom. They help pupils to understand key ideas. However, on occasion the work given does not encourage all pupils to practise and apply some of the more ambitious content they have been taught.

The school provides well for pupils' personal development. Pupils are taught about safety, including online risks and substance misuse, and the potential impact of social media on mental health. Sixth-form students learn practical skills, such as cooking healthy meals for independent living. Pupils in the specially resourced provision receive additional teaching on recognising healthy relationships. The school teaches pupils about prejudice and discrimination. Any such incidents are addressed swiftly. There is comprehensive support for pupils' next steps. This includes first-hand information from employers, apprenticeship providers and universities, for example.

Pupils' behaviour is good. Students in the sixth form are committed, attend well, are punctual and work hard. The school has established clear routines and expectations, which are well understood. Staff monitor pupils' behaviour carefully. Where concerns arise, they are addressed promptly. Staff take account of any additional needs and offer

extra support, where needed. This typically helps pupils to improve their behaviour. The school has high expectations for pupils' attendance. It identifies pupils with higher absence rates and provides them with generally effective support.

The governing body, trustees and trust leaders work closely with the school to identify areas for improvement. Changes are carefully planned, and leaders ensure that their actions are having a positive impact on pupils. They consider staff workload and listen to staff suggestions. Staff are typically well supported.

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 instances, teachers do not check systematically that pupils can recall and use the ambitious vocabulary they have been taught. As a result, some pupils are less confident in using precise language in their spoken and written work, which means that their work is sometimes of a lower quality than the school intends. The school should ensure that teachers check carefully that pupils have understood and can use new vocabulary in their work.
- Occasionally, the work that teachers give pupils does not focus sharply on the ambitious aims of the school's curriculum. As a result, there are occasions when pupils do not have opportunities to apply and practise all that they have been taught. The school should provide teachers with training and guidance to support them in providing work that enables all pupils to apply ambitious content from the school's curriculum.

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 predecessor school, also called The North School, to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2017.

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	148712
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10341898
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1,280
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	124
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Goodson
CEO of the trust	Michael Wilson
Headteacher	Clair Ellerby
Website	www.thenorthschool.org.uk
Date(s) of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The North School converted to become an academy school in January 2022. When its predecessor school, also called The North School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good for overall effectiveness.
- This school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with a diagnosis of autism. At the time of the inspection, there were 27 pupils on roll in the provision.
- Since the previous inspection of the predecessor school, this school has joined the Swale Academies Trust.
- There have been several changes to leadership since the school's last inspection, including the appointment of a new headteacher.
- The school uses one provider of registered alternative provision.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 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.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders. Inspectors also met with leaders with responsibility for sixth form, SEND, behaviour and attendance, and pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors met with representatives from the local governing body and the trust.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of work.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for parents, staff and pupils.
- 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

Rebecca Iles-Smith, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Debbie Brake	Ofsted Inspector
Cathy Reid	Ofsted Inspector

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