

Inspection of a good school: Nottingham Free School

The Courtaulds Building, 290 Haydn Road, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG5 1EB

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 November 2022

Outcome

Nottingham Free School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy the sense of community that it provides. Staff know pupils well. Leaders have high expectations of all pupils' achievements and behaviour. The curriculum is ambitious. Pupils know that their teachers want them to do well.

Pupils behave well in lessons. They feel safe in school. They are polite and show respect for each other, the staff and visitors. Leaders have encouraged pupils to have respect for those from different races and faiths. Pupils say that the school is a safe environment for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans community to be themselves. Staff take bullying seriously. Most pupils say that bullying is rare. Pupils value the support they receive when bullying does happen.

All pupils take part in enrichment activities. These enable pupils to develop new skills and to appreciate art, music and drama. Pupils learn about different careers and the choices they have to continue their education once they finish their GCSE courses.

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

Leaders have planned the curriculum to enable pupils to develop complex ideas. They have selected material carefully to enable pupils to become highly competent in the subjects that they study. There are planned opportunities for pupils to revisit what they already know. This helps pupils to remember what they have learned and to link their knowledge to new ideas. Teachers are experts in the subjects that they teach. They know how to help pupils to understand difficult concepts.

Most pupils achieve well, producing high-quality work and developing their understanding quickly. They can articulate complex ideas, use technical vocabulary and explain abstract concepts confidently. However, some pupils, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not always learn as well as their peers. Leaders have started to make improvements to the ways that these pupils are supported. Teachers now know

which pupils need additional support, and they have received training in how to provide this more effectively. As a result, these pupils are now becoming more engaged in lessons.

Teachers regularly check what pupils know and understand. Most teachers notice when pupils do not understand, and they provide additional support. Pupils use teachers' feedback to improve their understanding. Sometimes, teachers do not assess pupils' learning carefully enough. This leads to some pupils having gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Some pupils find it difficult to understand all written material that teachers use because their reading skills are not yet developed well enough. Teachers do not always notice when pupils are not able to read materials. Some pupils do not ask their teachers for help when they are struggling. This leads to some pupils learning less well than their peers. Leaders recognise that they need to act swiftly to provide support for these pupils so that they can quickly gain the knowledge and skills that they need to become fluent readers.

The behaviour policy is consistently applied. Pupils who find it difficult to behave appropriately are supported to meet the school's expectations. Low-level disruption is not tolerated. Teachers use activities and incentives for pupils to contribute positively. As a result of these actions, most pupils participate well in lessons and behave appropriately around the school site.

Pupils are provided with a comprehensive range of opportunities to support their wider development. These include enrichment activities at the end of the school day, voluntary clubs and access to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. These opportunities support pupils to develop their character, to appreciate the arts and to interact socially with others. Pupils are taught about a range of moral issues. Leaders consider the context of the local community when selecting topics for discussion. Pupils learn about a range of sensitive issues, for example the impact of microaggression.

Pupils are taught about how to prepare for the next steps in their education. They meet employers and learn about different careers that relate to the subjects that they are studying. Leaders have planned this work carefully to ensure that all pupils understand the opportunities that they have for their futures.

The new headteacher has rapidly identified the strengths and areas in the school to improve further. She is already taking decisive action to address these. Leaders engage with the staff very effectively and respond well to their feedback about their workload. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders work tirelessly to ensure that pupils are safe. They have developed a culture in the school where pupils and staff are confident to report concerns about pupils' safety and well-being. Leaders take all concerns seriously.

Governors, leaders and staff receive appropriate training to help them to identify pupils who may be at risk of harm. Leaders use their detailed knowledge of individual pupils and the close relationships that they have with pupils' families to support those at risk. They work effectively with other agencies to access specialist help when this is needed.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have only recently identified which pupils are not yet able to read fluently. They have not provided effective support for these pupils to enable them to catch up with their peers. As a result, some pupils are not able to read sufficiently well. This means that they do not always understand what they are given to read by teachers and are not yet able to enjoy reading. This limits their progress in some lessons. Leaders must ensure that these pupils are quickly taught how to read so that they become fluent readers and can learn more rapidly in lessons.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 in June 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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	141010
Local authority	Nottingham
Inspection number	10240813
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
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	662
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	72
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mr Richard Flewitt
Headteacher	Dr Jo Simpson
Website	www.nottinghamfreeschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 June 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up her post in September 2022.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school uses five registered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in science, mathematics, English and Spanish. For each deep dive, they met with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, spoke with pupils and met with teachers of the lessons they visited.
- Inspectors visited lessons and reviewed pupils' work from a wider range of subjects.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5. They spoke with pupils informally and observed the behaviour of pupils during social times.
- To consider the school's safeguarding procedures, the lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead. The lead inspector also looked at documentation relating to safeguarding and the school's single central record. Both inspectors spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- The lead inspector met with trustees and the chair of governors.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone to representatives of an alternative provider the school uses.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire. They also considered the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement plan, and information concerning pupils' attendance, behaviour and suspensions.

Inspection team

Ian Colling, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Keval Thakrar

Ofsted Inspector

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