

Nottingham Free School

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

Inspection dates

20–21 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- In a short period of time, the school has quickly and rightly established a strong local reputation. It is highly valued by parents and pupils.
- Leaders, governors and trustees have ensured that their high academic aspirations for pupils are matched by very strong pastoral and academic support.
- The headteacher is highly respected by the pupils, staff and parents. She leads the school with energy and intelligence. Her openness, warmth and determination that all pupils should succeed is recognised across the school community.
- The school's small size means that leaders and teachers know each of the pupils very well. This results in pupils who need extra help being quickly identified and provided with the support they need to thrive academically and socially.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including those who are looked after, are extremely well supported. This is also the case for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils make the same strong progress as others.
- The extended school day is used very effectively to strengthen pupils' independence, develop good learning habits and their self-discipline and to consolidate pupils' learning.
- The extensive and varied enrichment programme makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Very effective safeguarding arrangements ensure that pupils are kept safe at school. A strong programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) equips pupils with the knowledge and skills they need to understand and manage the changing risks they face as they become teenagers. Pupils report that bullying is rare.
- Pupils are well informed about a wide range of career paths. Good strategies are in place to highlight opportunities for higher education and training, particularly to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Pupils' attendance is above average and their behaviour is mostly good. On the few occasions where teaching is less effective, some pupils do not behave well enough. The proportion of pupils who are excluded from school for a short period of time is higher than average.
- Good-quality teaching, combined with excellent pastoral and academic support is resulting in outstanding outcomes for pupils. The quality of teaching in science is currently less consistent and weaker than in other subjects. Hence teaching is good rather than outstanding.
- Teachers do not always ensure that pupils present their work neatly enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the quality of teaching in science quickly improves to match the strong teaching pupils typically experience across the school.
- Develop strategies to improve pupils' skills in presenting their work neatly, particularly that of boys, and ensure that all staff insist on high standards of presentation.
- Reduce the proportion of pupils who are temporarily excluded from school by continuing to explore alternatives to exclusion for those who find it difficult to manage their behaviour.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Under the skilful leadership of the headteacher, the school is achieving its aims to develop highly ambitious young people who achieve well academically, exhibit strong employability skills and are considerate towards others. The overwhelming majority of pupils abide closely by the school's motto to 'Work hard, be kind.'
- Staff, pupils and parents are highly supportive of the school's leadership and the quality of education provided. Almost all parents reported their very high levels of satisfaction with the school. One parent, typifying the views of many others, commented, 'This is one of the best parenting decisions I have ever made.' Others commented on the excellent progress their children are making, the excellent leadership by the headteacher and her team and the high quality of transition into the school in Year 7.
- Pupils benefit from a curriculum which promotes academic rigour, personal responsibility and independence. High proportions of pupils in Year 9 are working towards the English Baccalaureate. Leaders recognise, however, that this route is not appropriate for all pupils and have tailored the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils well.
- The curriculum is enhanced strongly by excellent provision for enrichment. Pupils benefit from opportunities to pursue a wide range of activities, including sports, practical activities and the arts. All pupils can take advantage of these opportunities because they take place during the school's extended day. A wide range of trips and visits enhances the curriculum further.
- Teachers appreciate the leadership culture in the school in which leaders' high expectations are matched by genuine care for teachers' well-being. For example, leaders' expectations regarding teachers' marking are focusing more and more on increasing the quality and effectiveness of marking while reducing the quantity. Meetings are regularly timetabled to take place during the school day rather than after school.
- Provision for teachers' professional development is strong. Teachers say that they value the training they receive in school because it is carefully planned to focus on just a few key strategies. This means that they deepen their expertise in key areas and can implement their training easily and effectively. Leaders ensure that teachers are not overwhelmed by unnecessary, ill-conceived initiatives.
- Teachers benefit from working together in 'teaching and learning communities' where they refine their practice by observing each other teach.
- Checks on the quality of teaching are frequent, wide-ranging and developmental. Middle leaders play a key role in ensuring that teaching in their areas of responsibility is effective and that all groups of pupils learn well and make strong progress. They work well with senior leaders to bring about improvements where necessary.
- Leaders ensure that new staff, including newly qualified teachers, receive good support and training. Most quickly get to grips with the school's ethos and high expectations. Those at risk of failing the probation period set by the school receive appropriate

support to help improve their practice. Where teaching remains weak, senior staff ensure that teachers' contracts are not extended beyond the probationary period. Leaders know that teaching in science has been weaker this year than in the past and weaker than in other subjects. They are taking appropriate action to remedy this.

- School leaders are passionate that all pupils should succeed regardless of their backgrounds or the individual barriers to learning that they face. They ensure that the money allocated to support disadvantaged pupils, those who need help to catch up in English and mathematics and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, results in these pupils achieving as well as other pupils in the school.
- The trust has been instrumental in ensuring the school's success, setting out the vision for the school and drawing on expertise from across the trust to ensure that the school got off to a good start. Teaching staff from the trust have been deployed to the school, for example in computer science. Teachers benefit from working with colleagues from across the trust, for example, to moderate their judgements about pupils' attainment. They are also able to draw on the curriculum materials provided, which helps ensure quality while making teachers' workloads manageable. Staff at every level benefit from training provided by the trust, including in teaching and leadership.

Governance of the school

- Members of the local governing body are passionate about the school and provide good-quality support and challenge to senior leaders and other staff.
- The chair of governors meets regularly with the headteacher to check on the school's progress. Other governors maintain strong links with subject departments, regularly meeting with subject and other leaders to discuss the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- The effectiveness of governance is enhanced by the good-quality reports governors receive from senior staff. Minutes from the meetings of the governing body show that they prepare carefully for meetings so that they are able to question senior leaders very astutely about the information they are given.
- Governors have ensured that the school's safeguarding arrangements are effective by commissioning a review of the school's child protection arrangements from an external specialist.
- Governors' commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity is reflected in the questions they ask about the progress that different groups of pupils make, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate training when they join the school and that staff are fully aware of their statutory responsibilities. They ensure that all staff receive regular updates about changes to legislation and are alert to issues of local or national concern.

- Pupils learn how to stay safe through a well-taught programme of personal, social and health education. Records show that pupils are not afraid to report any concerns they have about their friends to staff.
- Senior staff take effective action to ensure that any pupils at risk of harm receive the support they need, including, where necessary, from social care and the police. Records show that they persist in ensuring that children get the support they need, sometimes in the face of slow responses from external agencies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan lessons carefully to ensure that the needs of different groups of pupils are met well. Most teachers make good use of the 'chilli tasks' to provide different tasks, which are most often tailored carefully to stretch and challenge pupils of all abilities.
- Teachers' questioning is highly effective, particularly when teachers have thought carefully about which pupils to direct particular questions to as part of their planning. Excellent examples were seen of teachers directing questions which challenged pupils of different abilities very well and ensured that all were kept 'on their toes', for example in physical education.
- Teachers are careful to ensure that their lessons involve everybody, including disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. They make good use of question cards to ensure that they direct questions to the pupils who need the most support to meet their challenging targets.
- The most effective teaching enables all pupils to thrive. For example, in a Year 7 Spanish lesson observed, every pupil in the class was fully engaged as they constructed sentences which set out their career aspirations. By the end of the lesson, pupils were able to articulate differences between Spanish and English grammar and tell their friends in Spanish which career they would like to pursue. The most able pupils were challenged to devise complex sentences in Spanish, such as, 'If I could, I would work as a doctor.'
- Teachers monitor pupils' progress very carefully in lessons to ensure that they are learning well. Not all teachers insist on the highest standards of presentation in pupils' work, however. Strategies to ensure that pupils are supported and challenged to produce work that is neatly presented are underdeveloped.
- Teachers make good use of homework and the additional study time provided to pupils to extend and deepen their learning. A few parents judge that pupils receive too much homework.
- The quality of teaching in science is currently less consistent than in other subjects. Pupils' behaviour is sometimes not managed as well in science as it is usually in other subjects. Occasionally, this results in silly behaviour which goes unchecked. In discussions, older pupils talked of how the quality of teaching in science had dipped this year. Although pupils continue to attain well in the assessments carried out in schools across the trust, the quality of work they have produced in their books this year is less consistent than in other subjects.

- Teachers' high expectations of all pupils are reflected in the challenging tasks they usually set. They do not, however, consistently insist on high standards of presentation in pupils' work. As a result, some of the boys sometimes produce work that is untidy.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils are polite, articulate and keen to do well. They are very respectful of others' needs and are committed to the school's ambition that they should always be kind to each other. This explains why the pupils feel very safe at school and say that there is very little bullying.
- Pupils are extremely well informed about potential risks to their well-being and safety. The well-taught PSHE programme is tailored to be age-appropriate and ensures that pupils receive good-quality guidance about staying healthy and about healthy relationships. In an effective PSHE lesson seen, Year 7 pupils learned how the risks associated with smoking are greatest for those who take up smoking before the age of 15.
- Leaders are not afraid to tackle potentially difficult and controversial issues to build pupils' awareness of the potential risks to their well-being that they may encounter. Pupils have learned how to identify the signs that someone may be at risk of female genital mutilation, for example. They have also learned to spot the signs that they or their friends may be becoming radicalised.
- Pupils have a strong understanding of fundamental British values. They recently ran a mock election to coincide with the general election to boost their understanding of democracy. They know that they must respect people who are different to them, whether because of their race, religion or gender. In discussions, Year 9 pupils talked knowledgeably and without any fuss about issues relating to sexuality and gender orientation. School leaders have also ensured that pupils are educated about gender inequality in Britain and around the world.
- The careers programme is a key strength. A range of strategies are in place to boost pupils' employability skills. Pupils maintain a passport to record how these are being developed. Pupils are well informed about the wide range of routes into higher education, training or employment available. Priority is given to helping disadvantaged pupils see that they too can aspire to the best universities and most rewarding jobs.
- The extended school day plays a key role in pupils' strong personal development. All pupils benefit from the wide range of enrichment opportunities and from the supervised private study periods. These sessions enable pupils to consolidate learning well and help them to develop a healthy work ethic. They also ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged by their personal circumstances which may make it more difficult for them to complete work at home.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave very well in most of their lessons and their good conduct usually makes a very strong contribution to their learning.
- The large majority of pupils rise to the school's high expectations regarding their behaviour and, consequently, learning takes place in an atmosphere that is purposeful and productive. Pupils enjoy getting the reward point cards their teachers regularly issue to reward their efforts in class.
- On the occasions where teaching is less effective, however, pupils do become distracted and a few do not behave as well as they should. In discussions, the pupils commonly reported that behaviour is mostly very good, but occasionally less so. Results from the Ofsted pupil survey and inspectors' observations concur with their views.
- Pupils conduct themselves well as they move around the school and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. The pupils are respectful and polite to adults, including support staff, and each other.
- Senior staff and year leaders provide a wide range of support for any pupils who find it more difficult to adapt to the school's high expectations. This includes provision for additional pastoral care and support and work with other local schools to help minimise the use of exclusion. Inspectors met with pupils who explained how their behaviour has improved as a result of the extra help they have been given. The proportion of pupils who are excluded from school for fixed periods of time remains above average, however.
- Pupils attend well and arrive punctually at school. Attendance overall is above average, though there is a small gap between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Outcomes are outstanding because good-quality teaching combines well, and with good effect, with the school's excellent use of assessment to check that pupils are making rapid progress and the strong learning habits that the overwhelming majority of pupils have developed.
- Senior leaders' high expectations of what all pupils can achieve are reflected in a curriculum that challenges them to excel across the range of academic subjects. In English, for example, pupils study a wide range of challenging texts, including dystopian fiction, Shakespeare and American literature. Pupils develop strong skills interpreting drama, poetry, fiction and non-fiction. One lower-attaining pupil wrote, 'The atmosphere in Hamlet is quite tense and makes you jump.' Pupils, and especially the most able pupils, skilfully use a range of sophisticated techniques in their creative writing to capture and hold the attention of the reader.
- The school has strengthened strategies to develop pupils' reading skills, for example by introducing 'drop everything and read' sessions each day and by increasing the rigour in assessments of reading. The school's current information shows that these changes

are having a clear and improved impact in raising the reading ages of all groups of pupils.

- Leaders have ensured that there are no gaps in achievement between different groups of pupils. They monitor very closely how well each group is achieving, including disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language.
- Leaders and teachers make very effective use of assessment to ensure that pupils are on track. Regular tests are moderated by staff from across the trust to ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment and progress are accurate.
- Where any pupils fall behind, staff quickly take action to help them get back up to speed. The pastoral and academic support for any pupils who are looked after is planned extremely carefully, making full use of the additional funding available, to ensure that these pupils make equally as strong progress as their peers.
- Strong and effective use of the pupil premium has ensured that lower-attaining disadvantaged pupils have received the support they have needed to catch up with their peers in English and mathematics. This means that, like other pupils in the school, they are on track to achieve or exceed their challenging targets.
- Strong transition arrangements mean that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities quickly receive the support they need when they join the school. The school's own testing arrangements have resulted in leaders identifying previously undiagnosed needs for a few pupils. This has enabled them to provide appropriate, tailored support, where necessary.
- In the lessons visited during the inspection, the pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities were fully engaged in their learning and enjoying it too. They were happy to talk about the high-quality work they have produced, for example in mathematics, art and Spanish. The pupils appreciate the additional teaching they receive in English and mathematics, where necessary, and told inspectors they understand the importance of doing well in 'the basics'.
- All groups of pupils are achieving well across a wide range of subjects. Like other pupils, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, benefit from a curriculum which challenges them well and is well taught.
- Pupils' progress in science has slowed this year as the consistency of science teaching has been less so than previously. A wide range of strategies has been implemented to good effect to lessen the impact of variations in teaching quality on pupils' achievement in science. As a result, pupils have continued to attain well in science, though the rapid gains pupils have made previously are currently being consolidated rather than advanced.

School details

Unique reference number	141010
Local authority	Nottingham
Inspection number	10031125

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	275
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Kul Ghattaora
Headteacher	Jenny Brown
Telephone number	0115 896 4949
Website	www.nottinghamfreeschool.co.uk
Email address	contact@nottinghamfreeschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Nottingham Free School opened in September 2014 with its first intake of Year 7 pupils. It has grown in each year and currently provides education for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Pupils currently in Year 9 will progress to Year 10 in September and the school's sixth form will open in September 2019.
- The school is much smaller than the average secondary school.
- Just over half of the pupils are from white British backgrounds. Other pupils come from diverse backgrounds. Approximately one-fifth of pupils have Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is very close to the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, as is the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- The school is part of Nova Education Trust.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website. The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school does not currently use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in a wide range of subjects across all year groups and saw most of the teachers teach. Many of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders from the school. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work across a range of subjects.
- Inspectors held formal meetings with different groups of pupils and spoke to pupils informally in lessons and during lunchtimes.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, other teachers, including newly qualified teachers, members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors, and representatives from Nova Education Trust.
- Inspectors took account of the 68 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the 55 responses from parents made through the Ofsted free-text service. They also considered the 41 responses to the Ofsted pupil questionnaire and the 32 responses from the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, records regarding attendance, behaviour and safety and the school's analysis of pupils' attainment and progress. They also scrutinised the school's records of checks made on the quality of teaching and records of training for staff. They considered the minutes of meetings of the local governing body.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's website.

Inspection team

Daniel Burton, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathryn Hardy	Ofsted Inspector
Nigel Boyd	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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