

Inspection of a good school: The Free School Norwich

Kings House, 15-17 Surrey Street, Norwich NR1 3NX

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 March 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils confidently give this school a 'big thumbs up'. Pupils are safe and well cared for. They put this down to the attentiveness of staff. From the start of early years, pupils learn the importance of hard work and good behaviour. They are eager to earn citizenship awards and house points or to be nominated as 'star of the week'.

Pupils conduct themselves well. They are attentive and keen learners. Pupils develop the confidence to ask for help if they need it. Pupils learn from an improving curriculum that interests them. However, the activities teachers provide for them in some subjects do not enable pupils to build on what they already know. While pupils enjoy their studies, their knowledge and understanding in some subjects lack the depth of that in reading and mathematics.

Pupils get along with each other. There are a rich range of faiths and cultures in the school community. Pupils enjoy learning about each other's backgrounds. Pupils really like the weekly additional 'personal learning' sessions, where they learn new skills such as speed typing, karate and pottery.

There is little bullying. Pupils say that staff take very seriously any incidents that do occur.

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

Trustees', leaders' and staff's expertise and dynamism are bringing about many improvements. Their actions have achieved much in the past 18 months. The impact of their work is deeply engrained in some areas, such as in the safe, positive and purposeful way that pupils and staff go about their work.

Leaders' strategies to improve the curriculum are well-judged and extensive. This work remains ongoing. Leaders have allocated more time to teaching subjects such as geography and history. The curriculum pupils learn has more breadth and a better balance to it. Pupils have sufficient curriculum time to build up their knowledge of each subject. However, the quality of education pupils receive is uneven. Some gaps in pupils' learning are not being filled.

In several subjects, leaders' ambitious curriculum plans are new. Teachers are teaching these curriculums for the first time and learning how best to deliver them. Teachers choose learning activities that interest pupils, but do not effectively take account of what pupils have studied in the past. Teachers' checks on how well pupils understand new information do not pick up some mistakes or misconceptions. This means that pupils' progress is slower than it should be.

Where the curriculum is better established, teachers know what content to teach and how best to teach it. They link new learning to pupils' previous studies. Teachers are quick to spot and correct pupils' misconceptions. Pupils develop a secure understanding of important knowledge and concepts. This is particularly the case in the early years, mathematics and reading.

Pupils become fluent in, and develop a love of, reading. From the start of early years, children's enthusiasm for a good story reflects that of their teachers. Staff teach phonics well. Pupils get lots of practice by reading stories full of the sounds they know. Adults quickly identify when a pupil is struggling to read. These pupils receive timely, effective support to catch up. Pupils sustain their enthusiasm for reading. They make frequent use of the new, well-stocked library. Pupils like the 'reading eagles' rewards and the time they have to read each day.

Leaders identify, and assess, the needs and capabilities of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) quickly. These pupils receive effective support to manage their emotions and to develop core literacy and numeracy skills. Like their classmates, the quality of education pupils with SEND receive in some subjects is variable.

In early years, adults model to, and teach, children how to behave well. There is lots of time given over to stories and discussion. Children are encouraged to share their own ideas. They learn to listen to their teachers and classmates. This lays strong foundations for positive social and learning habits when children move into Year 1.

Leaders are successful in helping pupils become good citizens of the future. 'Snack and chat sessions' and 'hear me' diaries encourage pupils to reflect on their emotions and achievements. The school's 'CU-THRIVE' programme serves as a constant reminder to make the right choices. Pupils play an important role in maintaining the school's happy, inclusive atmosphere.

The board of trustees is a driving force in bringing about improvement. Trustees provide leaders with clear guidance, support and challenge. Trustees and leaders aim to strike the right balance between sustained improvement and maintaining staff's well-being. Staff's feedback indicates that trustees and leaders are successful in doing so.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have deepened further the effective safeguarding culture noted at the time of the previous inspection. Staff are suitably trained. They know that 'no concern is too small to be ignored'. Staff report any concerns through the school's improved safeguarding systems. Leaders then act quickly and in the best interest of each pupil.

Trustees are thorough in checking the school's safeguarding systems and culture. They make sure that the necessary checks are carried out on adults working at the school. The school's record of these checks is suitably maintained.

Pupils are taught, and understand, how to keep themselves safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' actions to improve the curriculum in several subjects are recent. Teachers are still getting to grips with how best to teach these curriculums. They do not routinely choose the most appropriate content and activities to help pupils, including those with SEND, build their knowledge over time. Therefore, teachers are not closing some pupils' gaps in their learning. For some pupils, their progress is slower than it should be. Leaders must make sure that they give teachers the guidance and support to teach the curriculum well in every subject so that pupils build on prior learning and remember important knowledge over time.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2013.

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

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| Unique reference number | 136821 |
| Local authority | Norfolk |
| Inspection number | 10268606 |
| 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 | 183 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Julia Virgoe |
| Principal | Darren Webster |
| Website | www.freeschoolnorwich.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 26 July 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- The board of trustees is the body responsible for the governance of the school.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the principal, other senior leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The inspector met with several groups of pupils. The inspector also observed pupils at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- The inspector met with two members of the board of trustees (the board), including the chair of the board.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, geography and mathematics. In each deep dive, the inspector spoke with leaders and teachers, looked

at curriculum documentation, visited lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at examples of pupils' work. The inspector also spoke with leaders, looked at curriculum documentation and looked at pupils' work in a small number of other subjects.

- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at safeguarding documentation, spoke with staff, pupils and trustees and spoke with a representative from Norfolk local authority.
- The inspector considered the views expressed in the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and those of parents spoken with over the course of the inspection. The inspector took into account evidence from the school's parent and staff surveys.

Inspection team

John Lucas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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