

Inspection of a good school: Market Field School

School Road, Elmstead Market, Colchester, Essex CO7 7ET

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 October 2023

Outcome

Market Field School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Ruth Whitehead. The headteacher of the college is Duncan Thomas. This school is part of the Hope Learning Community, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Gary Smith, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Michael Andrews.

What is it like to attend this school?

Market Field School is a welcoming, friendly community. Pupils appreciate how well adults support their varying needs. The school gives pupils, including those students in the sixth-form college, a positive start to life.

Pupils access well-considered curriculum pathways that are suited to their needs and interests. Pupils and students in both the school and the college achieve a raft of suitable qualifications. These build their independence, confidence and prepare them well for life beyond the school.

Adults typically deal with pupils' behaviour and complex emotions well. Pupils' well-being is prioritised using appropriate therapies. Learning is not often disrupted. Pupils are respectful and considerate to each other's differences and boundaries. Pupils learn how to keep safe online or when in the community. On the playground, pupils engage in activities that mean they mix and cooperate with each other well.

Pupils benefit from a broad selection of interesting clubs and activities. This helps pupils to put their learning into practise. In addition, a high-quality careers curriculum and work experience in the sixth form provide a positive 'springboard'. This guides students well towards appropriate further education and employment.

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

Leaders have designed curriculum pathways that skilfully build on pupils' accurately identified starting points and needs. Leaders regularly review the curriculum. This ensures each pathway and subject remains ambitious and contains helpful plans and information that support staff in the classroom.

Leaders have ensured that learning activities are high quality. Important learning pupils need to remember is broken into small, manageable steps. This helps build pupils' knowledge over time. Staff regularly check what pupils know. They make effective adjustments to activities in lessons to meet pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The 'autism base' pathway, for instance, supports pupils to improve their communication knowledge. In the sixth form, students access a range of formal qualifications because their knowledge is built successfully during their time in the younger school years.

Leaders know clearly what areas of the curriculum need further work. A small number of subjects are being updated because the original curriculum areas are not clear enough in what pupils should learn and when. As the changes are ongoing, pupils have not benefited from them yet. In these areas, pupils' knowledge is not as secure as in more established curriculum areas. Therefore, they are not yet achieving as well as they could in these subjects.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have prioritised staff training. This includes the reading curriculum. This means staff support pupils well with their early reading knowledge. Pupils read with growing accuracy and fluency linked to their differing needs. All pupils get the opportunity to enjoy books, rhymes and stories. In the sixth form, staff expose students to texts they may not read themselves in order to expand students' horizons.

The school's speech and language team works closely with staff to ensure that pupils get the help they need to develop pupils' talk in the classroom. A range of appropriate aids and devices are used to ensure pupils' voices are heard.

The school has renewed its approach to dealing with behaviour, particularly with the continued growth in pupil numbers. Most adults are skilled in de-escalating tricky situations. The members of the 'well-being' team help to provide therapies and advice to support pupils to stay on track in the classroom. The school is generally a calm and safe place for pupils. A small minority of staff are still getting to grips with the best ways to support pupils' behaviour. This means that while physical interventions are reducing, the number is higher than leaders want them to be.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum has many strengths. Pupils learn about healthy eating, for instance. They develop the knowledge to cook for themselves or build their confidence dealing with customers in the college café. Pupils learn about how others are different from themselves. As a result, pupils are being well-prepared to be caring and respectful citizens.

Leaders place a high priority around work experience and employability. Therefore, pupils are regularly in the community at different workplaces. Through thoughtful and well-planned lessons, trips and experiences, staff support pupils well to develop confidence in their own strengths and abilities. Consequently, nearly all pupils and students leave the school to relevant workplaces or further education.

Leaders work closely with, and listen to, the community, including parents, staff and the trust. Staff feel the school considers their workload and well-being. The school regularly engages positively with parents through coffee mornings and meetings. The trust suitably challenges and supports the school in its improvement journey.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some areas of the curriculum are currently being renewed and refined. The curriculum thinking is either only just in place or being planned and rewritten. Therefore, in these curriculum areas, some pupils are not securing the knowledge they need to achieve well. The school should ensure all curriculum areas have the required detailed knowledge explicitly outlined, so teachers are clear about what to teach and when.
- The improved behaviour policy is not well embedded in all school practice. Some staff are getting to grips with the best approaches to de-escalate challenging behaviour. As a result, incidents like physical interventions are only just starting to reduce. The school should ensure that all staff know and understand the most effective processes to de-escalate challenging behaviour to maintain a calm learning environment for all.

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 October 2019.

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 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	143589
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10302746
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	446
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	119
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Andrews
CEO	Gary Smith
Headteachers	Ruth Whitehead (head of school) Duncan Thomas (head of college)
Website	www.marketfieldschool.com
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- The school is split over two sites known as 'Market Field School' and 'Market Field College'. Each site has a separate headteacher.
- The college site shares its facilities with another local sixth-form college.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative providers.
- All pupils have an educational health and care (EHC) plan. The school provides specialist education for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties, and autism. Some pupils have multiple needs.
- Many pupils join the school at different points in their school life.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Due to the nature of the specialist curriculum, inspectors carried out deep dives in the following areas: reading, PSHE education (including relationships and sex education) and mathematics. In each area, inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at evidence of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector reviewed curriculum documentation, visited lessons and spoke to leaders about physical education, computing and the employability curriculum areas.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's behaviour systems, attendance information and records of behaviour incidents.
- Inspectors scrutinised EHC plans for pupils across different classes and from both the school and college.
- The lead inspector considered the 78 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, including 78 free-text responses. The lead inspector also considered 129 responses to Ofsted's survey of staff.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with members of the trust, including the chief executive officer and a trustee.
- The lead inspector held telephone calls with a representative from the local authority, including the local authority's designated safeguarding officer.
- 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 spoke to a range of pupils from different classes across both days of the inspection. Inspectors spent time with pupils in unstructured times, including breaktimes and lunchtimes, to observe behaviour and speak to pupils about school life.

Inspection team

Damian Loneragan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ruth Brock

Ofsted Inspector

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