

Inspection of Bedford Free School

Cauldwell Street, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 9AD

Inspection dates: 15–16 January 2020

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where leaders, staff and pupils relentlessly strive for excellence in all that they do. Leaders' expectations of staff and pupils are exceptionally high and unyielding. Staff provide the support pupils need to meet these expectations. Pupils value their education and their time at school. They work with exceptional determination to achieve their admirable goals.

The very calm atmosphere at the school enables pupils to learn with great focus. Pupils are very well behaved. Staff coach and correct pupils to ensure that all pupils adhere to the details of the school's behaviour code. Pupils work exceptionally well independently and are highly supportive of each other when working together in lessons. Some pupils told us that joining this school has transformed the way they behave. They say that they now can do well in education and have improved life chances. Pupils feel safe and confident in the school's orderly and purposeful learning environment.

Pupils say, and school records show, that bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that the highly skilled pastoral staff can help them if bullying or other social challenges occur.

Leaders have designed an impressive curriculum for personal development. Pupils access a very wide range of activities that enrich their learning. They pursue their talents and interests with great enthusiasm.

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

The school provides high-quality education. The curriculum is structured very well. Leaders have ensured that teachers understand exactly what pupils need to know and be able to do. This enables teachers to build on what pupils have already learned. Teachers give lots of opportunities for pupils to revisit previously taught topics and skills. Teachers also provide pupils with effective resources to help them review what has been taught. As a result, pupils remember a great deal of what they have learned.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum and teaching meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders and teachers know their pupils very well. Staff carefully check how well pupils are doing and ensure that they receive effective support when necessary. When pupils fall behind, staff are quick to provide the help required so that pupils catch up.

Leaders and staff are ambitious about developing the most effective teaching practices at the school. Leaders pay close attention to each member of staff's learning needs. Leaders provide high-quality training so that all colleagues improve their teaching over time. Teachers enthusiastically seek out new approaches to teaching. They use educational research effectively to make their teaching even better.

Overall, pupil achievement is exceptional. However, pupils do not attain equally well across all subjects. In some subjects, the practical elements are not implemented in line with leaders' stated expectations. In some subjects, teachers do not take enough account of what pupils already know and can do to ensure that they make rapid progress.

The curriculum provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In religious education, for example, pupils learn to appreciate the impact of religious texts on people of faith and wider society. Pupils strongly agree that the school encourages them to respect people from differing backgrounds and to treat everyone equally.

Staff provide pupils with expert advice about their potential next steps in employment, education and training. Staff are committed to pupils aiming high when choosing potential careers. In 2019, all Year 11 pupils completed their GCSE courses having secured employment, education or training.

Governors and trustees are highly skilled in their roles. They provide excellent challenge and support for leaders. This ensures that leaders address areas that need improvement quickly and effectively. Governors and trustees focus on the best interests of pupils. Governors ensure that leaders work in partnership with parents and carers so that pupils get the best support possible. Governors keep a watchful eye on the number of pupils leaving the school and their reasons for doing so.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained regarding safeguarding. Staff know pupils well and are vigilant for signs of potential harm. When concerns arise, staff act quickly and appropriately. Leaders work well with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the necessary support.

Leaders ensure that all required checks are carried out on adults working with pupils.

Governors and trustees check to make sure that leaders and staff carry out their duties effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The overall curriculum is very strong, but in some subjects the implementation does not fully reflect the stated intentions of leaders. In some subjects, practical elements are not as strong as the theoretical. The school should ensure that the implementation of all aspects of each subject's curriculum reflect the leaders' stated intentions and the ambition they have for all pupils to excel.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	138228
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10121435
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	508
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ryan Tobias
Principal	Tim Blake
Website	www.bedfordfreeschool.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	15–16 March 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a new principal since the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We had discussions with the chief executive officer (CEO), the principal, members of the senior leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator (SENco) and curriculum leaders. We also had discussions with members of the trust board and members of the local governing body.
- We analysed the 53 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, the 52 text responses from parents, the 102 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 33 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- We spoke with teachers, including newly qualified teachers, support staff and pupils through the course of the inspection.
- We took account of a wide range of information, including the school’s website, development plans, information about pupils’ needs, leaders’ monitoring of the

quality of teaching and leaders' records about pupils' behaviour. Inspectors reviewed documentation regarding safeguarding.

- We visited lessons across the school and carried out scrutiny of pupils' books. We started the inspection focusing on English, history, science, modern foreign languages and design and technology. To answer questions raised on the first day of the inspection, we held discussions with leaders and considered planning in other subjects on the second day of the inspection.

Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Diana Osagie

Ofsted Inspector

Carole Herman

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020