

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: North Cestrian School

Dunham Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4AJ

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 November 2024

Outcome

North Cestrian School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Lee Bergin. This school is part of The Hamblin Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Tim Gartside, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Michael Thompson. The CEO is also the executive headteacher and is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

The Cestrian Way and ABC toolkit provides a firm foundation for pupils to build character. Pupils eagerly take up the weekly character development challenges. For instance, pupils' generosity of spirit is encouraged by performing acts of kindness such as writing appreciation cards to staff. Pupils confidently talk about how the school's values of fairness, hard work and honesty are threaded through everything that they do. They appreciate and embrace the way in which the school is preparing them for life after school.

Teachers have high expectations of pupils' academic achievement. Pupils take responsibility for their own learning. For example, most use 'prep' effectively to help them to embed knowledge. Many pupils achieve highly across a broad range of subjects.

There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere for learning. The routines for moving around school are well established. Pupils move around in an orderly manner. They behave very well. Pupils appreciate the diverse nature of the school. They enjoy celebrating and learning about each other's cultures through 'culture day'.

Pupils seize the manifold leadership opportunities from representing their form as form captain, raising money for the school's chosen charity or organising the school talent show.

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

The school's curriculum is broad and ambitious. In order to increase uptake of the English Baccalaureate, the school has promoted modern foreign languages and the opportunities that this opens up. As a result, more pupils are choosing to study this suite of subjects. The school has identified the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and explain concepts clearly. They design activities that help pupils to retain important knowledge. Most teachers make effective checks on pupils' learning. They identify and remedy misconceptions swiftly. Teachers check that pupils are ready to move onto new learning. Pupils can connect new ideas to prior learning and secure a deep understanding.

The school is adept at identifying pupils' additional needs. Staff are trained well to be able to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in their learning. For example, learning is modelled and broken down into small chunks where appropriate. This helps pupils with SEND to achieve well.

The school's reading curriculum is in development. There is a small minority of pupils who find reading difficult. Some of these pupils do not receive the support that they need to help them to improve their reading. As a result, this hampers how well they can achieve. Many pupils take pleasure in reading. Pupils challenge themselves to develop good reading habits. Many pupils have enjoyed the 'North Cestrian 100' reading challenge.

Pupils' behaviour is underpinned by the Cestrian Way. This helps them to understand the characteristics of an effective learner. For example, pupils understand that they can learn from mistakes. They articulate what a responsible learner is. Pupils learn free from disruption. The school has prioritised raising attendance. Most pupils attend school frequently. However, this is not always the case for some disadvantaged pupils. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of disadvantaged pupils' attendance has improved.

Personal development is the school's jewel in the crown. A multitude of opportunities are woven through the curriculum such as further reading, visits to art galleries and various competitions. The school's exceptional character development programme allows pupils to blossom into well-rounded individuals. Pupils abound with confidence and resilience. They are constantly challenged to think about 'what next?'. For example, pupils recount how being resourceful is a skill that they can evidence when they go for a job interview. Pupils high aspirations are supported by highly effective careers guidance.

Staff are supported well by the school. For example, the school devotes time for staff's development, including allowing them time to carry out educational research.

The trustees and governors know the school well. They support the school effectively. However, processes for monitoring the school's work are not finalised. Consequently, the school is unable to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies that it employs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's reading curriculum is in development. Consequently, some pupils, including some disadvantaged pupils, do not receive the help that they need to improve their reading. This hampers how well they can access other areas of the curriculum. The school should ensure that appropriate support is in place for these pupils, and that their progress is closely monitored, so that they learn to read fluently and confidently.
- The school's processes for evaluating its work are not clearly defined. This means that the school does not have a precise understanding of what is working well and what needs to be improved. The school should ensure that it develops a monitoring and evaluation system that allows it to sustain continuous improvements.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 for overall effectiveness in March 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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (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	143104
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	10348340
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	779
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Thompson
CEO of the trust	Tim Gartside
Headteacher	Lee Bergin
Website	www.northcestrian.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 March 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses two registered providers of alternative provisions for a very small number of pupils.
- There were no pupils on roll in the sixth form at the time of this inspection.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors spoke to the headteacher, other senior leaders and members of staff.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed behaviour at breaktimes and spoke to pupils about their experience of school.
- The lead inspector held discussions with a representative of the local authority. She also spoke with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and met with the CEO of the trust.
- 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 considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments, and the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Jenny Jones, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Neil Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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