

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Pictor Academy

Grove Lane, Timperley, Cheshire WA15 6PH

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 January 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Joanna Williams. The school is part of The Sovereign Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Paul Eckley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Eddie Austin.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pictor Academy is a caring, nurturing and welcoming environment for pupils. They are happy and enjoy school. Pupils behave well in school. This is due in part because they receive a high level of support. Relationships between staff and pupils are built on mutual trust and respect. Pupils know that they can turn to adults with any worries that they have.

There are high expectations of pupils' achievement. However, the school is in a period of change. The school is rightly focussed on redesigning and improving its curriculum. Improvements have been made, but there is still more work for the school to do. This is to ensure that pupils, who all have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), benefit from purposeful learning opportunities.

The personal, social, health and economic curriculum and pupils' wider development help to prepare pupils well for the next steps in their lives. This includes ensuring that pupils know how to keep themselves safe and have a good understanding of consent. A variety of trips and experiences help pupils with their everyday lives. For example, they visit the local shop to learn about how to buy ingredients for different meals.

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

Pupils' educational needs have changed since the previous inspection. This has led the school, with the support of the multi-academy trust, to redesign the curriculum so that it meets the needs of pupils more effectively. In recent times, the school has begun to improve the curriculum. In some aspects of the curriculum, it is clear what pupils need to learn and by when. Currently, some other aspects of the curriculum are not thought through as much. In these instances, there is less precision for teachers about what pupils need to learn. At times, this means that pupils do not learn all that they could.

Where the curriculum is stronger, teachers select activities which build successfully on pupils' previous learning. This is because the curriculum is clear, and this allows teachers to check effectively on what pupils know and understand. However, some of these checks on pupils' learning are not as effective as they should be. As a result, teachers are not sure about what pupils have retained from their previous learning. In these instances, teachers cannot support pupils as effectively to build up their knowledge and understanding over time.

Similarly, the school use pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to help it to guide pupils' learning. This includes ensuring that the curriculum helps pupils to meet the targets in their EHC plan. However, because in some subjects the curriculum content is not clear enough and the strategies teachers use to check on learning are new, some of the short-term targets set for pupils are not focused enough on their next steps. This makes it hard to see whether pupils have met the targets in their EHC plans.

Across the school, pupils behave well. Staff act promptly and successfully to help pupils who may need further support. This helps the school and classrooms to be calm, safe environments for pupils to learn in. Pupils display positive attitudes towards their learning. They remain focused on their activities. Outside the classrooms, pupils have different equipment which they can use for their sensory needs or enjoyment.

Pupils experience a broad range of opportunities to enrich their lives at school. This includes a residential activity adventure experience for older pupils. Pupils understand different ways in which they can keep themselves healthy. Pupils learn about different relationships. They have an assured understanding of what qualities make a good friend, and they can recognise these qualities in their peers.

Developing pupils' communication skills is a key part of the curriculum. Pupils learn very early fundamental skills well which helps them to communicate with others. Where appropriate, pupils progress on to the school's phonics programme. This helps pupils to move on to reading more difficult books.

Trustees work with governors to ensure that they have enough understanding of how well the school is performing. However, these checks are not as thorough as they should be. This means that they are not as clear as they could be about the school's effectiveness. Staff are positive about the changes which the school is making. They fully support them. They appreciate what the school does for their workload. They particularly value the

recent refinements to paperwork which have allowed them to concentrate on other aspects of their work.

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 has not finalised its thinking in some curriculum areas. This means that teachers are not as clear as they should be about what pupils need to learn and in what order. The school should ensure that it finalises its curriculum thinking in these remaining areas to provide greater clarity for teachers about what pupils need to learn and by when.
- Some checks on pupils' learning are not as effective as they should be. Teachers are not able to securely check whether pupils have understood previous curriculum content. The school should embed these new ways of checking so that teachers understand more clearly what pupils have retained from their previous learning.
- From time to time, the targets that teachers set for pupils are not specific enough to ensure that pupils can meet the requirements in their EHC plan. This means that teachers sometimes do not identify the small steps that pupils should take so that they achieve all that they can. The school should ensure that teachers receive training so that targets are more closely linked to pupils' needs.
- Trustees' and governors' checks on the school's effectiveness sometimes lack rigour. This affects how well they can support and challenge the school to continue to improve the quality of education for pupils. Trustees and governors should ensure that they have effective systems in place to check on the school's performance.

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 outstanding 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in January 2015.

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

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| Unique reference number | 142289 |
| Local authority | Trafford |
| Inspection number | 10321449 |
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Academy special converter |
| Age range of pupils | 2 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 124 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Eddie Austin |
| CEO of the trust | Paul Eckley |
| Headteacher | Joanna Williams |
| Website | www.pictoracademy.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 22 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- There have been a few staffing changes since the previous inspection. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2024. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed to work alongside the current deputy headteacher. There have been some changes to teaching and support staff.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- All pupils who attend the school have SEND. The school caters for a small cohort of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, moderate or severe learning difficulties and/or autism.

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 visited lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They met with school leaders to discuss pupils' rates of attendance.
- Inspectors met the CEO and two trustees, including the chair of the trustees. The lead inspector also met with a group of advisory committee members, including the chair of the advisory committee. He spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and as pupils moved around the school building. They scrutinised leaders' records of pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at the school. They spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff and for pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

Stuart Perkins, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Maria McGarry

Ofsted Inspector

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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

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