

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Sir Graham Balfour High School

North Avenue, Stafford, Staffordshire ST16 1NR

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 October 2024

Outcome

Sir Graham Balfour High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Matthew Mason. The school is part of the Insight Multi-Academy Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Lesley Beck, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Stephen Smith.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a warm and welcoming school. Pupils enjoy coming here and most attend often. Staff know their pupils and their families well. They use this knowledge to cultivate strong, nurturing relationships with pupils. Pupils value this. The schools' values of kindness, respect and compassion are increasingly clear to see in pupils' interactions with their peers.

Leaders have high expectations. They are ambitious for pupils and care deeply about their well-being. There is a growing culture of mutual respect between staff, pupils and parents. In the main, pupils behave well in lessons and around the school site. If pupils struggle to meet the school's expectations, they get the help they need. Leaders have worked hard to nurture this culture following the COVID-19 pandemic. If pupils have any concerns, they know who to talk to, and are confident that these will be resolved.

Pupils benefit from a broad range of experiences to develop their wider cultural capital. These opportunities have been carefully designed to ensure that all pupils, including those who are eligible for free school meals (FSM), benefit greatly from them. Trips to sites of cultural significance are used smartly. They enhance pupils' understanding of life in modern Britain.

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

Leaders are successfully steering the school through a period of significant change since the COVID-19 pandemic. They are taking the right steps, in the right order to secure continued success for pupils. The school takes careful account of staff wellbeing. Staff value and share this ambitious vision for pupils.

Pupils study a broad academic curriculum. Across each subject, leaders have identified what they want pupils to know and remember. They have sequenced this well so that the things pupils learn build successfully on what they have been taught before.

Recently, the school made significant improvements in the way teachers check on pupils' learning. In the main, staff use assessment skilfully to pinpoint the precise things that pupils are yet to learn. Teachers use this knowledge to adapt their teaching, closing gaps in pupils' knowledge quickly. This helps pupils make sound progress across the curriculum.

The school has recently rejuvenated its approach to supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school are building a comprehensive understanding of pupils' individual needs. They are working closely with families to achieve this. However, the information shared with staff about pupils' needs lacks clarity and is not always as specific as it ought to be. Consequently, staff are sometimes unclear about how to best meet pupils' needs in lessons. Where this happens, this holds pupils back.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders have rightly focused their attention on helping pupils to settle back into school. The school carefully monitors incidents of poor behaviour and provide effective, targeted support to those who need it. This work is helping pupils learn how to manage their emotions more effectively, and to rebuild relationships when these break down. As a result, behaviour across the school has improved a great deal recently.

The school has paid close attention to the experiences of pupils who are eligible for FSM. They are working smartly to ensure these pupils benefit from the same experiences as their peers. This work is having a positive impact. For example, pupils' attendance and behaviour in school is improving.

Leaders are working to promote a culture of reading here. However, support for pupils who are at an early stage of reading is not having a positive impact on all who need it. The school does not have a clear enough understanding of the gaps in some pupils' reading knowledge. As a result, the support pupils receive is not always well matched to their needs. Consequently, some pupils cannot read as confidently and fluently as they should.

The schools work to develop pupils' character is a growing strength. For example, many pupils across the sixth form act as mentors to younger pupils by supporting their reading, and wider well-being. Pupils often support charities by raising money for communities in need. For example, pupils recently raised money to buy exercise books and other school

equipment for a small rural community in Cambodia. Through this work, pupils here develop a secure understanding of their social and moral responsibilities. The school also make sure that pupils', including those in the sixth form, receive high quality information about their next steps and the world of 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 information that the school shares with teachers about pupils' SEND is not precise enough. This means that staff are unclear about how best to meet pupils' individual needs. Consequently, some pupils' needs are not being sufficiently met, and they struggle to access the learning. The school should ensure that the information they share with staff accurately reflects pupils' individual needs, and that all staff routinely implement effective strategies to better meet pupils' needs within lessons.
- The school's work to support pupils who struggle to read is in its early stages, and not always well matched to their reading need. Consequently, some pupils are unable to read as well as they should. This undermines their ability to access the curriculum. The school should ensure that they accurately identify the precise gaps in pupils' reading knowledge and provide focused support so that all pupils are able to read fluently and with confidence.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Sir Graham Balfour High School, to be good for overall effectiveness in May 2014.

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	142983
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10344082
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	970
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	72
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Stephen Smith
CEO of the trust	Lesley Beck
Headteacher	Matthew Mason
Website	www.sirgrahambalfour.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 May 2019

Information about this school

- Sir Graham Balfour High School is the sole school that makes up the Insight Multi Academy Trust.
- The school makes use of two unregistered providers of alternative provision for a small number of pupils.
- 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 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- An inspector met with the CEO and other members of the trust.
- An inspector met with three members of the local governing body (LGB), including the chair of the LGB.
- Inspectors focused inspection activity on the following groups of subjects: science, languages, history, geography, and mathematics. For each group of subjects, inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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 with pupils at social times and in formal meetings.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff and also considered the opinions expressed through the staff survey.
- Inspectors met with staff and gathered parents' views by reviewing responses, including free-text responses, submitted to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Alexander Laney, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Trudi Young

Ofsted Inspector

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