

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Reach Free School

Long Lane, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, WD3 8AB

Inspection dates:

15 and 16 October 2024

Outcome

The Reach Free School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Richard Booth. This school is a single academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Carolyn Venn.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy as part of The Reach Free School community. Teachers have high expectations for their behaviour and learning. The school prioritises the well-being and personal development of pupils. They receive high-quality guidance and care. Pupils value the fact that there are plenty of adults who will listen to them.

Pupils, including sixth-form students, access a broad range of subjects that challenge them academically. They typically achieve well. On occasions, pupils do not have the chance to extend and deepen what they learn. This can limit how well pupils learn more complex ideas.

Pupils' experiences at this school are exceptional. They take part in a wide range of 'electives', trips and opportunities, as well as giving to the wider community. These activities broaden pupils' interests, experiences and understanding of the world. For example, pupils in Year 7 participate in overnight camping, and in Year 10 pupils visit a school in Valencia. Pupils can also take part in clubs such as further maths and digital animation.

Pupils learn about equality and diversity. Pupils spoke about how everyone is equal and differences are accepted. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They clearly understand the expectations and conduct themselves responsibly. They treat each other and staff with respect.

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

The school has developed a well-constructed, broad and ambitious academic curriculum. The English Baccalaureate is at the heart of the curriculum in Year 10 and Year 11. Teachers precisely identify the knowledge pupils need to learn. This knowledge builds on pupils' prior learning.

Leaders ensure staff have access to a high-quality programme of training and development. Consequently, teachers have the subject knowledge they need to teach the curriculum well. There is a clear approach to checking what pupils know and can remember. However, sometimes this information is not used precisely enough to build on pupils' understanding and fully meet all of their needs. When this happens pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are very well supported in the school. The school clearly identifies the needs of pupils with SEND and considers the adaptations they need. Staff provide effective support for pupils with SEND. This enables them to work independently to access the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils with SEND achieve well.

The school has identified some pupils who need to get better at reading. A small group of pupils receive support through a phonics programme. This helps them to become better readers, ensuring pupils are able to access the rest of the curriculum. However, some pupils continue to find reading difficult. They are not supported well enough to improve their reading, which means that they do not achieve as well as they might.

Staff induct pupils expertly into the school and clearly outline the behaviours expected in this community. As a result, excellent behaviour is the norm. For the small number of pupils who struggle with their behaviour, there is strong pastoral support that helps them to make changes for the better. Disruption to learning is very rare. The school's work to improve attendance is also effective. Attendance is a high priority for the school and is improving.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities, including an extensive programme of trips and visits. This includes trips to the Houses of Parliament for humanities students and to the science laboratories at a university for A-level biologists. The school has carefully planned for pupils' wider experiences so that they develop pupils' talents and interests. Students in the sixth form plan and run a variety of activities in the school. 'Ambassadors' and members of the 'Junior Common Room' lead initiatives such as 'Just Talk', raising awareness of the importance of speaking out to support good mental health. Sixth-form students are excellent role models for others.

The school provides support for pupils' personal development through the 'Reach Beyond' programme. Pupils develop self-confidence and a secure understanding of the world around them. Pupils learn how to look after their physical and mental health.

High-quality careers advice and guidance runs through the school's work. Pupils make well-informed decisions about their curriculum, activities and next steps. Students in the sixth form move on to a range of appropriate destinations, including universities, workplaces and apprenticeships.

The board of trustees knows the school well. It provides effective challenge and support for leaders. Leaders engage well with staff, who appreciate the consideration given to their training and well-being. Teachers in the early stages of their teaching careers are well supported.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasion, some teachers do not use their checks on pupils' understanding to make necessary adaptations to build effectively on pupils' prior learning. This means that sometimes teaching is not adapted precisely enough to fully meet pupils' needs, which means they do not learn or achieve as well as they could. The school needs to ensure that staff use their checks on pupils' understanding to make the adaptations to learning that pupils need to learn consistently well.
- The school does not provide effective support for some pupils who find reading difficult. This means that these pupils cannot read fluently, do not access the curriculum as well as they might and do not achieve as well as they could. The school should ensure that it identifies all pupils who need support with reading and provides the support that they need to get better at reading.

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 February 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	139662
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345371
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
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	766
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	105
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Carolyn Venn
Headteacher	Richard Booth
Website	www.reachfreeschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	27 and 28 February 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses one registered alternative provision.
- 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.
- The school is a single academy trust. The board of trustees are referred to as governors by the school.

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 a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team.
- The lead inspector met with five members of the governing body, including the chair of the academy trust and a school improvement adviser.
- Inspectors met with several groups of pupils and staff to gather their views of the school. Inspectors also considered the results of the staff and pupil surveys as well as the 129 responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online parental questionnaire.
- 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.

Inspection team

Sue Pryor, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Cathy Barr

Ofsted Inspector

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