

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: John Mason School

Wootton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1JB

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 December 2024

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 Alastair West. This school is part of Abingdon Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Dr Fiona Hammans, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jonathan Hopkins.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy taking part in a range of enrichment activities and clubs including sports, gardening, chess and music. They take pride when working together to rehearse and then perform, such as for their 'Winter Concert'. Pupils show maturity in how they celebrate their own and each other's successes. Leadership roles provide pupils with the opportunity to develop skills in public speaking, organisation, managing budgets and marketing.

The school is generally calm and orderly. It has recently renewed its expectations of pupils. Many pupils understand these expectations well. Relationships between staff and pupils are often positive and warm. Pupils know that they are cared for and that staff will help them when they need it. However, too many pupils do not achieve as well as they should, particularly pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Too often, the barriers that these pupils face in their learning, behaviour or attendance are not addressed quickly or consistently enough to make the difference that they need to achieve well. The school rightly prioritises these pupils as it embeds higher expectations and new strategies.

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

There has been recent and significant change within the school's leadership team following a period of staffing turbulence. The school is now more settled and has the staff

it needs to address the key challenges that have emerged. Leaders at all levels, including in the trust and local academy committee, understand the improvements that need to be made. There are appropriate plans in place to ensure that the school improves pupils' outcomes and lives up to its ambition to develop pupils who are determined, respectful and who take up opportunities. Trust leaders know the school well. They are well equipped to offer appropriate support and challenge so that the school can continue to improve under new leadership, while ensuring that staff workload is considered carefully.

The curriculum in many subjects has been redesigned to ensure it is ambitious and provides pupils with the knowledge and skills that they need. Learning is coherently sequenced so that knowledge builds over time, with opportunities to check and reinforce what has been learned before. While some staff check pupils' understanding well in lessons, this is not sufficiently consistent across school. This means that too often teachers do not accurately identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. Therefore, misconceptions are not addressed and pupils do not achieve as well as they should. In contrast, gaps in sixth-form students' knowledge are identified well through discussion. Students in the sixth form, therefore, gain secure knowledge and achieve more highly than pupils in the rest of school.

The school has identified pupils who need extra support, including those with SEND, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with low reading ages. The reading programme supports pupils to develop literacy and comprehension. This helps pupils to catch up so that they can read more confidently and fluently. However, these pupils do not get the specific support that they need to learn well in all subjects because lessons are not adapted effectively to meet their needs. This means that disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND, tend to achieve less well than their peers.

The school has implemented new policies and practices to improve pupils' behaviour. However, suspensions remain too high due to instances of pupils being defiant and disruptive. The school has developed new strategies to support pupils who struggle to focus and behave appropriately in lessons, or to attend school regularly enough. Staff do not apply these processes in practice consistently well. Currently, many pupils' attendance is too low, particularly those who are most disadvantaged. This means that they miss crucial learning and development opportunities.

Personal development is a strength of the school. The well-designed programme ensures that pupils know how to keep themselves healthy and safe. Sixth-form students relish the opportunity to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. This teaches them to be resilient, resourceful and how to work as a team. There are several committees of pupils that organise events in school and with other local schools. These groups of leaders encourage pupils across different year groups to work together and support one another. For example, sixth-form students produce support guides for younger year groups, detailing how to revise for different subjects and how to create timetables to prepare for exams. Helpful careers advice and guidance supports pupils to consider different pathways and make the right, aspirational, choices.

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 does not consistently check what pupils know or remember effectively. As a result, gaps or misconceptions in pupils' knowledge and understanding are not addressed as well as they should be. The school should ensure that all staff have the knowledge and skills to accurately identify gaps and misconceptions and adapt their delivery of lessons to rectify these.
- The achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils remains too wide. The school should ensure that all staff know pupils' specific barriers to learning in their subjects and use agreed strategies to support these pupils more effectively in lessons to help them catch up and achieve as well as they should.
- Some staff do not identify or address inattention in lessons. This means that too often pupils opt out of learning or are distracted. These pupils miss out on important learning. The school must ensure that all staff have the knowledge and skills to consistently apply the high expectations of behaviour set out in the school's own behaviour management policies.
- Pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and pupils with SEND, are not attending school as regularly as they should. The rates of absence remain persistently high for too many pupils. As a result, they are missing out on vital learning and wider development opportunities. The school and trust should maintain a sharp focus on reducing rates of absence. They must continue to implement and persist with effective strategies to secure sustained improvement in pupils' attendance.
- The school's new systems, processes and expectations are not consistently applied or understood by all staff. This means that improvements to learning, behaviour and attendance are not as embedded or rapid as they need to be. The school must ensure that it continues to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of new systems and processes to ensure consistency across the school.

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 on 21 and 22 May 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	140580
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10341768
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
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	1,002
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	133
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jonathan Hopkins
CEO of the trust	Dr Fiona Hammans
Headteacher	Alastair West
Website	www.johnmason.oxon.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	21 and 22 May 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up his post in September 2023.
- The school is part of Abingdon Learning Trust.
- The school currently uses two forms of registered alternative provision and eight forms of unregistered 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.

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 members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, pastoral leaders, members of the local academy committee and trust leaders.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also looked at behaviour around the school during the start of the day and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors met a range of teaching and support staff. They also looked at the responses to Ofsted's surveys for parents and staff.
- 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.

Inspection team

Alexandra Aldridge-Gibbons, lead inspector His Majesty's Inspector

Ed Mather His Majesty's Inspector

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