

Inspection of a good school: Cotham School

Cotham Lawn Road, Cotham, Bristol BS6 6DT

Inspection dates: 17 to 18 October 2023

Outcome

Cotham School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Jo Butler. This school is part of the Cotham School 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 Sandra Fryer.

What is it like to attend this school?

Cotham School is diverse and inclusive. Pupils enjoy attending. They feel safe in school and learn how to stay safe in the wider community. Pupils know that staff care about them and will help them. The values of 'respect, achievement and diversity' underpin all aspects of school life.

There are high expectations for what all pupils can achieve. The school strives to provide the same high-quality education to all pupils, regardless of their starting points or the challenges they face.

Pupils behave well. They are polite and friendly. The school supports pupils who need extra help to meet the high expectations that staff have of them. Bullying is rare and is stopped quickly if it does occur. The atmosphere around the school is calm and harmonious. Learning is rarely interrupted by poor behaviour.

The range of extra-curricular clubs enable pupils to develop their talents and interests. A recent production of 'Matilda' is a source of pride for many pupils and parents. Leadership opportunities include reading buddies, sports leaders, house captains and 'respect ambassadors'. Pupils contribute to the life of the school and the wider community.

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

The curriculum is aspirational for all pupils. It aims to improve their life chances through its breadth and ambition. The curriculum is linked to potential careers. This helps pupils to see the relevance of what they learn and broadens their horizons. The range of post-16

courses and subjects are well matched to the needs and future aspirations of sixth-form students.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They know how what they teach prepares pupils for the next stage in their education. This is a particular strength in the sixth form. Teaching ensures that pupils remember what they have learned before. Occasionally teaching does not enable pupils to learn new knowledge at the right time. The work that pupils complete is not always demanding. This limits the extent to which some pupils can develop a deep body of knowledge.

Teachers check what pupils know. They revisit key knowledge when needed. They ensure that pupils understand the essential vocabulary in each subject. Staff know pupils' needs. They support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language well. Consequently, these pupils learn the curriculum alongside their peers.

The school identifies pupils who do not read well enough to access the curriculum. Staff provide precise support which helps these pupils to improve their reading. All pupils in key stage 3 read books which develop their vocabulary and help them learn about moral issues and different cultures. Pupils in key stage 4 read as part of their tutor programme and within lessons. The reading that sixth-form students do helps them to develop a wide body of knowledge of the subjects they study.

Most pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. The respectful relationships between staff and pupils create a purposeful environment in lessons. Incidents of poor behaviour are well managed by staff so that learning is not interrupted. Leaders understand the typical causes of pupils' absence. The action they have taken has led to improved attendance.

All aspects of the curriculum focus on pupils' broader development, as well as building subject knowledge. For example, all subjects consider a variety of cultures in what they teach. Pupils learn about relationships and sex education in an age-appropriate way. They know what respect is and how to demonstrate it in their relationships with others. This includes knowing how to challenge behaviour that makes them feel uncomfortable. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

The school celebrates the diverse community that it serves. Pupils and their families feel welcome and valued. The school actively engages with parents and the wider community. For example, it has recently hosted an event celebrating African-Caribbean culture. The school's work with community groups and local universities has enhanced pupils' learning about Black History Month.

Leaders check the impact of the school's actions and identify emerging priorities promptly. They consider the views of pupils, parents and staff in decision-making. The school uses its knowledge of the local area to adapt its approach. It works tirelessly with other agencies to prevent pupils from being at increased risk of harm.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes the work given to pupils does not reflect the ambition of the curriculum. When this is the case, pupils cannot deepen their learning as far as they could. The school needs to ensure that the way the curriculum is taught enables pupils to build on their knowledge at the right time.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 in April 2018.

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	137440
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	10297997
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	1,650
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	440
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sandra Fryer
Headteacher	Jo Butler
Website	www.cotham.bristol.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 April 2018

Information about this school

- The school uses two unregistered alternative provisions and four registered alternative provisions.
- 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 carried out deep dives into these subjects: English, mathematics, history and modern foreign languages.
- For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some 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 met with senior leaders from the school.
- An inspector met with several trustees, including the chair of the trust
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the views of staff and pupils in Ofsted's online surveys. Inspectors also spoke to pupils and staff in meetings and around the school site.

Inspection team

Sarah Favager-Dalton, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Simon Tong

Ofsted Inspector

David New

Ofsted Inspector

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