Inspection of The Free School Norwich

Kings House, 15–17 Surrey Street, Norwich NR1 3NX

Inspection dates:	20 and 21 May 2025
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early years provision	**Outstanding**
Previous inspection grade	Good

The principal of this school is Darren Webster. The school is part of a single academy trust, The Free School Norwich, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Julia Virgoe.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils take pride in their school. They care about each other and appreciate the support they receive from staff. They trust staff to help them when they have worries or concerns. Pupils learn how to stay safe and look after their mental and physical health.

Pupils show respect for one another and the adults in school. They speak enthusiastically about the subjects they study. The learning environment is calm, active and purposeful. Recent curriculum improvements help pupils deepen their knowledge and understanding. Pupils achieve well and are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

A wide range of visits enrich pupils' learning. These experiences strengthen their ability to remember important knowledge. Pupils have opportunities to take on leadership roles. They raise money and make meaningful changes to their school. They learn key values such as democracy, respect and tolerance.

Children settle quickly in the early years because of high expectations and established routines. They take turns, share resources and collaborate. They applaud each other's achievements. The strong foundations built in the early years prepare children extremely well for learning in Year 1.

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

The curriculum is well structured, helping pupils build their knowledge over time. Regular opportunities to revisit past learning reinforce pupils' understanding. Teaching is engaging and sparks curiosity. Pupils record their learning in various ways. This helps pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to show their understanding.

In the early years, the curriculum is exciting and engaging. Skilled adults help children to communicate and develop their vocabulary. They encourage rich discussions. Staff adapt the curriculum exceptionally well, considering children's needs and interests. They inspire children to try new things.

The curriculum from Year 1 to Year 6 is ambitious. For example, in history Year 6 pupils explore racism in post-war Britain. They learn about empire and invasion, connecting ideas across different time periods. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their learning, describing lessons as enjoyable and memorable.

In many subjects, staff check how well pupils are learning. These checks help to identify emerging needs, including for pupils with SEND. Staff put in appropriate support and adaptations for pupils with SEND when needed. In some subjects, staff do not do check pupils' grasp of the curriculum as effectively. Teachers sometimes do not spot where pupils' understanding is less secure in these subjects. When this happens, teaching sometimes does not build effectively on what pupils have learned before.

Pupils love learning phonics. Familiar routines and daily practice strengthen skills and build fluency. Pupils read books that match the sounds they are learning. Staff check how

well pupils are learning and, where needed, ensure timely support. This approach helps pupils become confident, enthusiastic readers. In the early years, children apply their learning through purposeful and imaginative play. For example, they choose to create and illustrate books in the writing area. These they share proudly with adults and friends. Older pupils read widely. They become critical readers, discussing their likes and dislikes.

Recent improvements to the teaching of writing have enhanced the quality of pupils' work in English. Pupils learn about key writing features and apply them in their own work. Pupils learn to write for different purposes. However, in some other subjects, teachers' expectations for pupils' written work are not consistently high. They do not ensure that pupils apply their basic writing skills when recording their learning. This means that, in these subjects, pupils lack opportunities to reinforce their understanding and communicate their ideas clearly through their written work.

The school embraces its location in the heart of the city. Trips and visitors provide pupils with a diverse range of experiences. These enrich pupils' learning. There are opportunities to learn from experts. An architect's visit helped pupils gain a better understanding of how bridges are built in design and technology, for example. Trips to the beach and local museums deepen pupils' understanding.

Pupils are respectful of each other. They speak confidently about what makes them special and unique. This fosters a culture of mutual respect and care. Pupils behave well. They are eager to do well and try their best.

Leaders have successfully guided the school through a period of change. They know the school well and offer support, care and challenge. They have strengthened the curriculum. The essential knowledge pupils need to learn is outlined clearly. Staff have received the necessary training to implement these changes. Leaders have managed curriculum improvements effectively while considering staff workload and well-being. The school shares a strong commitment to ongoing improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, teachers do not have consistently high expectations for pupils' writing. This is because the school does not expect pupils to routinely apply their writing skills when recording their learning in subjects other than English. As a result, some pupils do not reinforce their understanding and communicate their ideas across the curriculum clearly. The school should ensure that teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' writing across all subjects.
- In some foundation subjects, staff do not use their checks on pupils' learning effectively. They do not use these checks to inform their future teaching. This means pupils do not achieve as well as they could in these subjects. The school should ensure

that staff use information from their checks on pupils' learning to inform future teaching so that they build effectively on pupils' prior learning in all subjects.

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	136821
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10323705
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Julia Virgoe
Principal	Darren Webster
Website	www.freeschoolnorwich.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	29 and 30 March 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The board of trustees is the body responsible for the governance of the school.
- The school uses one alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors met with the principal, the senior leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator, the chair of the board of trustees and members of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, design and technology and history. 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.
- The inspectors also discussed the curriculum and provision for pupils with SEND, and sampled work from other areas of the curriculum.
- Inspectors considered the responses and free-text responses submitted by parents to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- 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

Oriana Dalton, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Carol Dallas	Ofsted Inspector

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