School report

Inspection of Cedars Upper School

Mentmore Road, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 2AE

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 April 2023

Overall effectiveness	**Good**
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Sixth-form provision	**Outstanding**
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Cedars Upper School achieve well. They benefit from leaders' high expectations of their learning. This is especially the case in the sixth form, where students make exceptional progress.

There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils' personal development. All pupils are supported to access these, including the most disadvantaged. Pupils praise the range of exciting trips, and wider extra-curricular opportunities. A typical theme of pupils' views was that if it were not for the school, they would never have these rich experiences.

Pupils are active in the community. Sixth-form students support pupils lower down the school, and in other local schools. Older students are exemplary role models. Pupils are proud of the tangible difference they make, such as through the charity work organised by sixth formers. A recent instance of this raised thousands of pounds.

Behaviour overall is positive. Pupils are calm, respectful and orderly around the school. They focus on learning in lessons. There is no culture of bullying or harassment. Pupils have positive relationships with staff and trust them to resolve any issues or concerns. Pupils get effective help with their well-being. As a result, they feel safe and like being at school.

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

Leaders and the trust are ambitious for all pupils to learn what is needed to be successful. The curriculum meets the needs of pupils. For example, leaders consider carefully how best to use digital technology to support learning. They maximise links with local businesses, such as biotechnology for science and motor sports for engineering. Subject leaders plan how pupils will build what they know incrementally over time, including important vocabulary. This means pupils develop a rich and detailed knowledge of concepts, for example about different genres in music. This includes for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Teachers mostly deliver the curriculum well. They have strong subject knowledge. Where staff need support, leaders and the trust act quickly to provide this. Teachers use well-considered and creative activities to implement leaders' curriculum intentions. Staff help pupils with SEND to learn effectively. These pupils access the curriculum and make strong progress. Occasionally, however, teachers do not check pupils' understanding as closely as they should. Where this is the case, the learning is not adapted as precisely as it could be to support those who struggle. Consequently, some pupils lose confidence. They do not build up their knowledge and skills as securely as they could.

Leaders have created a culture where reading is valued. The weakest readers get the help they need to read texts fluently and to understand them.

Students in the sixth form learn an aspirational and demanding curriculum. Leaders plan meticulously how students extend what they know beyond their learning in lessons. If any students struggle, they receive immediate and successful support to catch up. The curriculum throughout the school builds up pupils' independence well. Consequently, students in the sixth form are highly motivated. They articulate their learning with considerable depth of understanding and achieve excellent outcomes.

Leaders set high expectations for how pupils should behave. In most cases, pupils respond to these well. For example, pupils have high attendance. Sixth formers show very strong levels of respect. However, leaders have not ensured that staff always apply their expectations consistently. This means that, at times, a few pupils struggle to behave their best, both in the classroom and outside of it.

The curriculum supports pupils' personal development effectively in most cases. Their learning about areas such as democracy and diversity prepares them well for life in a changing world. Pupils express a mature understanding of difficult aspects of relationships, for example consent. That said, the curriculum and wider work of the school do not help pupils to develop some aspects of their character as well as leaders intend. Occasionally, they lack resilience and do not engage wholeheartedly with their learning. This in turn makes some pupils less proud of their school than they might be.

Careers education and guidance is strong. Pupils are able to make informed and successful choices about their future. This is especially so in the sixth form. Students get helpful information about their next steps from the beginning of Year 12. Many progress to top universities. Students also get wide-ranging advice about alternative options, such as high-level apprenticeships.

The trust ensures that there is effective governance. Trust leaders and governors provide support and challenge, for example about equalities and safeguarding. The trust has helped leaders to improve the school effectively, particularly the quality of education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders know the local risks, and act to pre-empt these. The risks that particular pupils may face, such as those with SEND, are assessed closely. Leaders train staff well in how to spot and log concerns. There are appropriate processes in place to manage cases. Records show prompt and careful actions when concerns arise.

Pupils learn about safety through the curriculum, such as staying safe when online. They know who to talk to if they have concerns.

Leaders ensure that they practise safer recruitment and make thorough vetting checks on new and current staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not routinely check as effectively as they might that pupils are learning the ambitious curriculum. This means that when some pupils fall behind, teachers do not adapt the learning well enough to help them to understand it. Leaders need to ensure that all teachers are trained to check learning well in all areas of the curriculum. This is so that they can adapt learning systematically and appropriately, with the result that pupils who occasionally struggle to understand the ambitious curriculum aims are supported effectively to do this.
- Leaders have not ensured that their high expectations of pupils' behaviour are implemented consistently in all areas. This means that there is occasional variance in how well pupils follow leaders' expectations, both in lessons and around the school. Leaders need to make sure that staff apply their expectations at all times, so that pupils behave their best throughout the day.
- The curriculum for developing pupils' character is not as carefully delivered and embedded as it might be. As a result, some pupils lack enthusiasm for school and for their learning. Consequently, they do not benefit from their education as much as they could. Leaders should work with pupils and other stakeholders to devise an exemplary programme of character development for pupils that is implemented effectively and well understood.

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' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137462
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10242237
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	1,008
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	287
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Graham Pryor
Headteacher	Mark Gibbs
Website	http://www.cedarsupper.org.uk/
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 October 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Chiltern Learning Trust.
- The headteacher and some other senior leaders were recently appointed in September 2022.
- The headteacher and chair of governors also have the same roles for Linslade Middle School, Leighton Buzzard LU7 2PA.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chief executive officer (CEO) and other representatives from the trust, the headteacher, senior leaders, other leaders, staff and pupils.
- As part of evaluating the quality of governance, the lead inspector met with the CEO, another trust leader and two governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, mathematics, art, music and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- As part of the evaluation of safeguarding, inspectors checked the school's single central record of recruitment vetting checks, considered its safeguarding policy and procedures and spoke with leaders, staff, parents, carers and pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed the 213 responses that were submitted from this academic year by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and 129 free-text responses submitted during the inspection. Inspectors considered the 64 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire for school staff and the 137 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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