

# The Fermain Academy

Oxford Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 8JG

## Inspection dates

12–13 June 2018

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- Leaders, governors and staff have established a school that truly changes the lives of pupils and their families.
- In a short period of time, leaders have had a considerable impact on improving education for some of the most vulnerable pupils in the locality. As such, they have helped to orchestrate improvements to education within the local area.
- Pupils typically join the school feeling demoralised. The school quickly builds their confidence and self-esteem. This underpins the excellent academic progress that they make.
- The school supports pupils to develop a clear understanding of right and wrong. Pupils become committed and responsible citizens and many aspire to follow careers that will enable them to help others.
- The school lays secure foundations for pupils' futures. Pupils experience considerable success at a range of appropriate post-16 destinations.
- Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. Staff teach them how to regulate their own behaviour. Pupils also develop strategies to help each other to maintain calm and purposeful behaviour at all times.
- Teachers have very high expectations of pupils. They provide work that enables them to make rapid progress.
- Leaders fundamentally understand that pupils often join the school with vast reservoirs of untapped potential. As such, they recognise that teachers could provide pupils with even greater challenge.
- The curriculum is exceptionally broad, balanced and aspirational. Pupils benefit from intensive support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. This is complemented by a range of subjects that provide equality of opportunity with pupils in mainstream schools.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils benefit from a broad range of opportunities that enrich the formal curriculum.
- Leaders have ensured that arrangements for safeguarding are thorough and help pupils to overcome any additional vulnerabilities caused by disrupted schooling. Pupils trust and respect staff and feel comfortable sharing any concerns with them.
- The school has a dramatic impact on improving pupils' attendance. Rates of overall attendance are close to last year's national averages for all schools.
- Leaders are acutely aware that many pupils who join the school have potentially undiagnosed special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They recognise that stronger partnership work is required to ensure that such pupils receive the support that they need.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Work closely with those who use the school as alternative provision, parents and carers and the local authority, to ensure that the needs of pupils who have potentially undiagnosed SEN and/or disabilities are assessed in a timely manner.
- Capitalise further on the school's clear success in giving pupils the confidence and skills that they need for learning by providing them with even more challenging work that enables pupils of all abilities to make even greater leaps in their progress.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- Since the school's inception, leaders and governors have worked together to establish a thriving school that realises their ambition to re-engage pupils who have disengaged from education. Underpinning the school's success is leaders' infectious passion for changing pupils' lives.
- Leaders have ensured that the school's ambitious values radiate from all members of the school community. Staff and pupils affectionately refer to the school as the 'Fermain family'.
- All members of staff are encouraged and inspired to be leaders. They model the values and behaviours that they expect from pupils, and they all lead important whole-school projects. These develop their leadership skills while enhancing the quality of education offered by the school.
- The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is meticulous. Leaders' monitoring of teaching is thorough, perceptive and balanced. They use the information that they gather from their monitoring to establish priorities for further training and improvement that continue to drive further enhancements in teaching.
- Training for teachers ensures that teaching continues to improve and meet the changing demands presented by pupils' differing and diverse needs. Wherever possible, staff are encouraged to lead training. This reflects the importance that leaders attach to staff and pupils learning from their peers.
- Leaders have adopted some innovative approaches to staff development. In particular, a number of graduates have trained to teach while working at the school as non-qualified teachers. These members of staff have benefited from extensive training opportunities and have received excellent support. This has enabled them to develop into highly effective teachers.
- Leaders have a clear and nuanced understanding of the school's strengths and areas of relative weakness. They use this understanding to plan effectively for continued improvement.
- Leaders and governors use appraisal to hold staff to account. Members of staff are set ambitious targets for pupils' achievement and their own personal development.
- In a short period of time, leaders have ensured that the school has had a positive impact on education in the local area. They have built strong and productive relationships with other schools who send pupils to Fermain. Rates of permanent exclusion in the local area have decreased at key stage 4. As a result of this success, the school is currently trialling an intervention programme for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion in key stage 3. The early indications suggest that this programme has the potential to help pupils in key stage 3 to avoid being excluded from their mainstream schools.
- Leaders have established an exceptionally broad, balanced and aspirational curriculum. English and mathematics assume central importance in the curriculum, as leaders recognise that progress in these subjects holds the key to unlocking pupils' potential in

other areas.

- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is effective in challenging pupils academically. For example, all key stage 4 pupils study history daily and some pupils are given the opportunity to study triple science and/or computer science. Leaders have a clear rationale for the curriculum, which reflects their desire to create equality of opportunity for pupils in their care.
- Leaders attach a high priority to learning about history. This complements the school's impressive work to promote fundamental British values and the strong work undertaken to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- Leaders have constructed the curriculum carefully to ensure that it meets the needs of pupils who join the school at times other than at the start of the academic year. Teachers are adept at enabling pupils in the same classes to complete different qualifications. Furthermore, the school's arrangements for providing a period of transition for pupils when they join the school leave nothing to chance. New pupils benefit from intensive personalised support on entry to the school, which enables them to fit in with established routines and join established classes seamlessly.
- Leaders have ensured that the formal curriculum is augmented by the provision of a diverse range of extra-curricular opportunities. Pupils play games such as darts, pool and board games with staff before and after school and during breaktimes. Staff also provide Saturday and summer school to provide pupils with opportunities such as horse riding, recording music or going to the cinema. A range of trips, such as visits to art galleries and outdoor pursuits, provide further enrichment and act as an additional boost to pupils' personal development.
- Staff feel immensely proud to work at the school. They feel that leaders are considerate of their well-being and that they are open, supportive and kind. Staff feel committed to the school and appreciate the opportunities that they are given to follow their passions and have a positive impact on the whole school.
- Parents are full of praise for the school. They appreciate the non-judgemental approach adopted by staff. They feel that their children are excelling at the school. Parents typically describe the school as being a 'miracle' for their children and they greatly appreciate that the 'door is always open to parents'. They feel that the school has transformed their lives and the lives of their children.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) ensures that staff are attentive to the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Despite this, the number of pupils with an education, health and care plan is very small. In addition, leaders feel that many pupils have joined the school with undiagnosed SEN and/or disabilities due to weak processes for identifying need across the local authority. Although leaders have established systems that partly remedy this situation, they are keen to work more closely with partners. These include those schools that use the school as alternative provision, parents and the local authority, to ensure that pupils receive the support to which they are entitled. The SENCo ensures that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are encouraged to attend regularly and make fast progress both academically and in their personal development.

## Governance of the school

- Governors are passionate about ensuring that pupils benefit from the best possible opportunities. They hold leaders to account for all aspects of the school's effectiveness and have established a number of innovative procedures that enable them to assess the validity of leaders' judgements about how well the school is performing. For example, 'insight weeks' provide governors with the opportunity to scrutinise different aspects of the school's work.
- Governors have a broad range of skills that enable them to evaluate the school in a variety of ways. The different perspectives offered by governors have been instrumental in establishing the breadth of the school's strengths.

## Safeguarding

- Leaders have ensured that a strong safeguarding culture permeates all aspects of the school's work. The school's success is built on the strength of relationships that pupils enjoy with staff and each other. These relationships are characterised by high levels of trust and a glowing sense of mutual respect. Pupils feel confident about sharing any concerns with staff. Members of staff are exceptionally vigilant in detecting any changes in pupils' mood or behaviour. As a result, any concerns are identified and acted on quickly.
- Pupils are helped effectively to develop a very clear understanding about how to keep themselves safe. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural lessons act as a focal point for helping pupils to understand different risks, such as those online and those relating to relationships, alcohol and drugs.
- Leaders have ensured that staff share a clear understanding of the safeguarding risks that are potentially more prevalent in the different areas where pupils live and at different times in the year. Alongside thorough and regular training, this enables staff to spot quickly any symptoms of neglect or abuse.
- The strength of the school's work to keep pupils safe has been recognised by the local authority. As a result, the vice principal is working alongside leaders of other schools to develop common strategies for managing risk across the local area.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Outstanding

- Teachers are highly skilled at maintaining pupils' positive attitudes to learning. They are adept at addressing misconceptions and reframing teaching in a way that keeps pupils' interest and motivation.
- Teachers question pupils very effectively. They check pupils' prior learning systematically and challenge pupils to deepen their reasoning and thinking. Pupils have been coached to respond to questions in a thoughtful, respectful and considered manner.
- Pupils are encouraged and inspired to be inquisitive and ask questions. This helps them to explore and comprehend new materials.

- Teachers are highly skilled at sensitively increasing the level of difficulty required for pupils to make sustained progress in their learning. Teachers are also highly effective at giving pupils the skills and confidence that they need as learners. However, teachers sometimes do not capitalise on this by providing pupils with the consistently demanding work that would enable them to make even greater leaps in their learning.
- Teaching in English and mathematics is highly effective. In addition, all staff capably provide opportunities for pupils to develop their basic numeracy and literacy skills. Leaders have recently launched a bold and ambitious strategy to help pupils to develop a love of reading. However, this work is in its infancy and therefore it is too early to evaluate the extent to which pupils are becoming avid readers.
- Teachers are skilled at using relevant stimuli to engage pupils in a way that enables them to apply their learning to different contexts. For example, teachers use photographs from significant historical wars as a vehicle for developing pupils' ability to empathise with others and make deductions from evidence.
- Teachers are discerning in their use of resources to support pupils' learning. They are careful not to provide pupils with too much support for fear of stifling or capping their achievement.
- Teaching assistants support pupils capably. They are skilled at questioning pupils and encouraging them to think and act for themselves.
- Teachers are very clear in their expectations and instructions. They have a calm and persistent manner with pupils and use their secure knowledge of the subjects that they teach to engage pupils.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Outstanding

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Many pupils told inspectors that they feel that the school has helped them to 'get back on track'. Pupils, therefore, feel that the school has had a transformational impact on their lives. They feel that the school has boosted their self-esteem and provided them with the confidence that has enabled them to approach life with a different outlook.
- The longer the pupils have been at the school, the more confident they are as learners. From their frequently disengaged starting points, they make remarkable progress towards becoming confident, committed and self-assured learners.
- Leaders have ensured that consideration for pupils' well-being underpins all that the school does. Staff make every effort to reduce pupils' anxiety. They have created a climate which supports pupils' mental and emotional health.
- Leaders have developed innovative systems for tracking pupils' social, emotional and personal development. They use this information to ensure that all pupils receive the personalised support that is necessary for them to thrive.
- Pupils are encouraged to become thoughtful and considerate citizens. For example, they are encouraged to become active within their local community by helping out in an old people's home.

- Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities that help them to develop clear ideas about their futures. For example, the school organises careers fairs, work experience placements and appointments with independent careers advisers. This work is instrumental in helping pupils to develop clear and appropriate aspirations for when they leave school.
- Pupils are helped to develop a clear understanding of danger, including different forms of bullying. They are adamant that there is no bullying at the school. However, they are confident that, should it happen, the staff would deal with it appropriately and decisively.
- The member of staff with oversight for the progress of children looked after ensures that these pupils make the same rapid social and academic progress as others in the school. The head of the virtual school, who has overall responsibility for children looked after who reside in the local authority, praised the support that the school provides for this group. She also appreciates the extent to which the school responds to feedback and demonstrates a willingness to learn and improve.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They behave impeccably. No instances of poor behaviour were seen during the inspection. Pupils arrive at school behaving sensibly and leave in a similar fashion.
- Pupils have been helped to develop high expectations of their own conduct and the behaviour of others. As a result, positive peer pressure fuels constant improvements in pupils' behaviour.
- Leaders have established clear and effective routines. Very strong relationships and high expectations provide pupils with the consistency and security that they need to improve their behaviour. As a result, the school is exceptionally successful at securing improvements in pupils' behaviour.
- Over time, the staff have been able to create a situation in which they are able to focus almost exclusively on praising and encouraging positive behaviour, rather than having to challenge negative behaviour. Pupils, therefore, get swept up in a tide of positivity. Pupils feel that staff understand them as individuals. They also say that they feel respected by the staff and, as a consequence, are keen to show staff how much they respect them in return.
- Pupils respond very well to praise and rewards and there is little need for staff to use sanctions. Rates of fixed-term exclusion are very low for a school of this type. Furthermore, it has been well over a year since staff have had to restrain a pupil physically.
- Pupils attend school regularly. For some time, rates of attendance have been close to national averages for all schools. On average, pupils improve their attendance by almost 30% on joining the school. This reflects the great lengths that leaders go to in order to promote good attendance and challenge unnecessary absence. More fundamentally, it reflects the fact that pupils quickly feel as though they belong at the school and are reluctant to have time off.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Outstanding

- Due to disrupted schooling, the majority of pupils have stagnated or regressed in their learning over the months or years prior to them joining the school. Leaders rightfully acknowledge that most pupils arrive at the school with vast reserves of untapped potential. From these very low and often depressed starting points, the school ensures that pupils make rapid progress. This makes strong inroads into diminishing the differences in attainment and progress between pupils at the school and other pupils nationally.
- Pupils are helped to recognise their true potential when they join the school. In addition to boosting their self-esteem, this creates an impetus for pupils to do their best. They are also encouraged to develop an innate interest in the subjects that they study. Consequently, pupils' improved attitudes to learning underpin the fast progress that they make when they join the school.
- Leaders have developed clear and effective systems for establishing pupils' prior attainment on entry to the school. They also track pupils' progress very closely.
- Leaders, governors and staff share high expectations for the amount of progress that pupils are capable of making. Pupils' targets are aspirational.
- Pupils make exceptionally quick progress in English and mathematics. This enables them to gain meaningful qualifications and equips them with the key skills that enable them to be successful across the curriculum and once they leave the school.
- Leaders' information about pupils' progress clearly shows that all pupils, including those who are looked after, those who are disadvantaged, those who have SEN and/or disabilities and the most able, make similar fast rates of progress from their respective starting points.
- In addition to English and mathematics, pupils make particularly fast progress in the subjects that they choose to study. This is because pupils are encouraged to immerse themselves in subjects that they enjoy and follow their passions and interests. Progress is also fast, but slightly less so in other subjects that the school considers to be mandatory, such as history and science.
- The fast progress that pupils make allows them to gain a broad range of relevant qualifications. These include GCSEs, BTEC National Diplomas and entry level qualifications. In turn, these give pupils access to further opportunities once they leave the school that exploit their interests and aptitudes and therefore lay firm foundations for the future. The number and breadth of qualifications that pupils attain are particularly remarkable given that the average amount of time spent by pupils at the school is 13 months.
- In 2017, over half of pupils attained a standard or higher pass in GCSE mathematics and one quarter attained the same standard in GCSE English. All pupils attained the equivalent of five or more GCSEs at A\* to G.
- Leaders use information from the precise systems for charting pupils' social, emotional and personal development alongside academic and pastoral information to build up a clear overall view of pupils' development. This information is also used to determine the additional strategies that are implemented to ensure that any dips in pupils'

progress remain temporary.

- Since the school opened, all pupils who have left have advanced to suitable college places, employment or further training. The school maintains very close relationships with past pupils and makes contact with ex-pupils and their colleges, employers or training providers every three months. Leaders' close monitoring of how well pupils get on after they leave the school confirms how well pupils are enabled to become successful in the long term. Pupils become ambitious for the future and many are inspired to follow professions that are focused on helping others, such as teaching, social work and paramedics.

## School details

Unique reference number	141935
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10046598

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Armstrong
Principal	Nic Brindle
Telephone number	01625 611001
Website	<a href="http://www.thefermainacademy.org">www.thefermainacademy.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@thefermainacademy.org">admin@thefermainacademy.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2015. Since then, the number of pupils attending the school has increased significantly.
- The school has been rebuilt since opening. The new building was completed for the start of the current academic year.
- The school takes pupils from a wide range of schools in Cheshire East local authority and beyond. All pupils are also on roll with a 'home' school. For some pupils, the 'home' school is the Oakfield Lodge School, which is the local authority's pupil referral unit.
- All pupils have been permanently excluded from school or have been at risk of permanent exclusion.
- The work of the school is currently overseen by the East Cheshire Youth Achievement Free School Trust. The trust is in the process of being reconstituted and renamed to coincide with the recent announcement that it is to open a second school in Crewe for pupils aged 4 to 16 with social, emotional and mental health needs. The new school is

due to open in 2019.

- The majority of governors are also trustees.
- The school has been supported closely by the Department for Education since opening.
- A very small number of pupils have an education, health and care plan. A number of pupils are in the process of assessment for such a plan.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to support through the pupil premium funding is well above the national average. A number of pupils are children looked after.
- The majority of pupils are of white British heritage. There are more boys than girls at the school.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- During the current academic year, the school has piloted a small number of places for pupils in Years 7 and 8. This pilot has focused on providing short-term intensive support for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. Once the pilot has been reviewed, the school will make a decision on whether or not to extend the age range of the pupils for which it is registered.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders from other schools who use the Fermain Academy as alternative provision. They also spoke with a representative of the local authority, the member of staff from the Department for Education who has supported the school and the head of the local authority's virtual school, who is responsible for overseeing the education of children looked after.
- Inspectors observed lessons with school leaders and conducted an extensive scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed behaviour around the school, including observing pupils as they arrived at school and during break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including leaders' self-evaluation, plans to improve the school, information on attendance and behaviour, documents relating to safeguarding and information that illustrates how much progress pupils have made since joining the school.
- Inspectors met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors spoke with a number of parents and considered eight comments made by parents via Ofsted's free-text facility. There were too few parental responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, for these to be considered.
- Inspectors spoke formally with groups of pupils and informally with others. They also considered the results of the school's own work to capture pupils' views of the school. No pupils completed the Ofsted questionnaire.
- Inspectors spoke formally with groups of staff. They also considered 17 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Will Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Martin Hanbury

Ofsted Inspector

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