

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Ely College

Downham Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB6 2SH

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 March 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that the school's work may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The principal of this school is Simon Warburton. This school is part of Meridian Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Mark Woods, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Shirley Jamieson. There is also an executive principal, Martin Campbell, who is responsible for this school and three others.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this inclusive school and feel safe. Staff take the time to build positive relationships with pupils. Pupils feel known as individuals in this large school. The mixed-age tutor groups allow pupils to form friendships. They learn positive habits from older role models. Pupils know they can go to a trusted adult should they have any concerns.

The broad and ambitious curriculum engages all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils benefit from the high expectations that staff have for their academic achievement. They display high levels of perseverance when work is challenging. This means that pupils achieve exceptionally well.

The school's 'PLEDGES' award develops pupils' life skills and cultural awareness. Pupils take part in, organise and lead activities in school and the local community. Pupils also access a high-quality offer of enrichment opportunities. The diverse range of activities include sports, arts, drama, charity work and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Pupils are particularly proud of chamber choir performances at Ely Cathedral. There are educational visits to museums, theatres and field trips in the local area and abroad. These activities are well attended by pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.

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

The school's broad and rich curriculum is well considered. It is ambitious and challenging for all pupils. There is a wide range of academic and vocational courses, particularly in the sixth form. The curriculum builds well on pupils' previous learning and takes account of their different needs. Subject leaders have outlined precisely what pupils must know and understand. Teachers are highly skilled at adapting the learning to meet pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils at all levels are challenged. Pupils achieve highly and are well prepared for the next steps in their education, employment or training.

Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They receive regular, high-quality training. This ensures that they are skilled in using the most effective strategies to teach the curriculum well. Teachers regularly check what pupils know. They are clear and precise when explaining new information. If pupils struggle, teachers are quick to intervene. The support they provide is highly effective in ensuring that pupils can quickly move on with their learning.

There is a very well-considered curriculum for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A small number of pupils study a bespoke curriculum that supports their needs. Teachers know pupils' individual needs and apply effective strategies to support them.

The school has a strong culture of reading. Pupils read a wide variety of challenging texts. If pupils struggle to read fluently when they join, the school provides effective support to help them build their confidence.

The number of students in the sixth form has increased in recent years. The school's inclusive approach provides an opportunity for students to study courses they may not be able to access in other schools. However, on occasions, expectations of sixth-form students, particularly regarding attendance, are not as high as in the rest of the school. Some sixth-form students do not attend as regularly as they should. This means that some students do not achieve as well as they could.

The school has high expectations for behaviour. As a result, the behaviour of many pupils is exemplary. They are polite and respectful. For the small number of pupils who struggle with their behaviour, there is strong pastoral support. This helps them to make changes for the better. Low-level disruption to pupils' learning is very rare.

The house system is a strength of the school. Pupils have regular planned individual mentoring time with the form tutor. This develops positive relationships. It also allows pupils to set targets and agree the support they need to be successful.

There is a very broad personal development offer. The personal development programme builds pupils' knowledge effectively over time. Pupils learn about keeping safe, mental health and how to have positive relationships. Many pupils develop their leadership skills.

They take up opportunities to become house ambassadors, school councillors or librarians.

High-quality careers advice and guidance run through the school's work. Pupils make well-informed decisions about their curriculum, activities and next steps. Students in the sixth form move on to a range of appropriate destinations, including universities, workplaces and apprenticeships.

Trustees and governors have high aspirations for the school. They know the school exceptionally well. They provide a wide range of skills and experience. This helps provide an equal balance of support and holding leaders effectively to account. Staff, including early career teachers, say that they are very well supported. Staff feel valued. They appreciate how leaders look after their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Expectations of students' attendance in the sixth form do not always match those of the rest of the school. Attendance in the sixth form is not as high as in the rest of the school. This results in some sixth-form students not achieving as well as they could. The school should strengthen further the expectations of attendance across the sixth form, so that students achieve equally as well as other pupils in 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 in June 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	143404
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10345460
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	1,638
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	240
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Shirley Jamieson
CEO of the trust	Mark Woods
Principal	Simon Warburton
Website	www.elycollege.com
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Meridian Trust.
- The school uses 10 unregistered 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 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.
- The inspectors met with the chair of the trust, chair of governors and other governors.
- The inspectors met with the CEO, trust executive principals and other trust leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders at an alternative provision.
- The 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 observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times. They considered pupils' views about behaviour in school. They also spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.
- 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.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including school policies, the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation document and minutes from meetings of the governing body and trust board.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and Ofsted's staff survey. They also considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

Inspection team

Rob James, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Robins	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Gray	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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