

Inspection of Ernulf Academy

Barford Road, St. Neots PE19 2SH

Inspection dates:	21 and 22 January 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Thomas Fisher. This school is part of Astrea Academy 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), Rowena Hackwood, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ben Brown. There is also a regional director, Jo Myhill-Johnson, who is responsible for this school and four others.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils settle into the life of the school well. They make new friends and enjoy their lessons. Pupils are safe, happy and well looked after. Older pupils are, in the main, positive about the improvements that have been made to the school. They appreciate the increased number of enrichment opportunities. During their weekly 'electives' session, pupils enjoy developing new skills and exploring their interests. There is a wide range of activities that they benefit from, including sports, music, art, mathematics and paranormal club.

The revised curriculum is now ambitious for all pupils. It has been expertly designed to build on pupils' prior learning and revisit important knowledge. Pupils appreciate this increased challenge. They are proud of what they know and are keen to achieve well. They like the quizzing and opportunities to think deeply. In the main, pupils work hard and grapple with tricky concepts, which are taught well. Due to recent improvements in the curriculum, most pupils now achieve well. However, the impact of these changes is not yet evident in the published examination results, as previous pupils have not benefitted fully from them.

In lessons, most pupils behave well. They understand the rules, and most pupils follow them consistently. Pupils are attentive and listen respectfully to their teacher. Disruption to learning is rare. When it does happen, teachers respond quickly to minimise its impact on pupils' learning.

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

The curriculum is well structured to build pupils' knowledge and skills over time. Teachers receive precise training to ensure that they are skilled to deliver the curriculum as leaders intend. They often explain topics clearly and regularly check that pupils have understood the learning. Teachers use techniques such as questioning to revisit and explore key knowledge effectively. As a result, many pupils remember their learning well.

After checking what pupils know and can do, teachers often provide pupils with clear guidance and actions to take to improve their work. Where this happens, pupils know how to get better. They confidently apply their learning and produce high-quality work. However, in some cases, teachers do not provide pupils with specific steps to improve their work. As a result, some pupils are unsure how to improve. Subsequently, their work lacks the depth and fluency that staff intend.

The school ensures that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Clear processes are in place to accurately identify pupils with SEND. For many, their needs are met effectively through thoughtful adaptations in class. Those pupils with SEND requiring additional support receive targeted help from well-trained staff, including assistance with reading, mathematics or social skills.

Each day, pupils engage with an ambitious book during their 'Astrea Reads' session. In class, they read aloud regularly to enhance their oracy skills. For some pupils, additional

support is provided to strengthen their reading skills. This ensures they can fully access the curriculum.

Staff consistently apply the school's behaviour expectations. This ensures that lessons are calm and focused. Pupils appreciate this supportive environment. It enables them to engage fully with their learning. The school provides targeted support to pupils who find regular attendance challenging, helping them to feel included and supported. Behaviour outside of lessons is generally positive. However, some pupils need extra help to meet the school's high expectations. Unacceptable behaviour, such as pushing in corridors or using derogatory language about sexuality or race, upsets others when it occurs. The school has taken some action to address these issues, but a minority of older pupils still struggle to meet the raised expectations.

The school's work on personal development helps build pupils' confidence and prepares them well for their next steps. Regular trips help to broaden pupils' understanding of the world and strengthens their knowledge of religions and each other's differences. Over time, pupils gain a strong awareness of the wide range of career opportunities open to them, which inspires their ambitions.

Governors, trustees and leaders have worked collaboratively and effectively to achieve significant improvements since the previous inspection. Many staff are positive about the school. However, a significant number of parents and carers report issues with communication. They feel their concerns are not always acknowledged or dealt with in a timely manner. This frustrates parents and affects their confidence in how well the school deals with their concerns.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- After checking what pupils know and can do, teachers do not consistently provide pupils with sufficiently precise guidance and actions to improve their work. As a result, some pupils do not know how to improve and deepen their understanding. The work that they produce does not always meet the ambition of the curriculum. The school should ensure that teachers consistently provide pupils with guidance on how to improve their work and deepen their understanding.
- Some pupils do not meet the school's high behaviour standards. Incidents such as pushing in corridors and the use of derogatory language upsets the large majority of pupils who want to enjoy a respectful and positive atmosphere. The school should strengthen its behaviour support strategies to ensure that all pupils adhere to the high expectations for behaviour.

- The school has not established effective communication with parents and carers. Some parents feel less engaged with the school. This lack of engagement reduces opportunities for effective collaboration between the school and families. This leads to many parents lacking confidence in how well their concerns are addressed. The school should take rapid action to strengthen communication strategies to ensure that parents and carers feel informed, valued and included in their child's education.

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	146369
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10347275
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	743
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ben Brown
CEO of the trust	Rowena Hackwood
Principal	Thomas Fisher
Website	www.astreaernulf.org
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 January 2023

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the trust has appointed a new principal and three new vice-principals.
- 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.
- The school uses one unregistered and four registered alternative providers.

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.
- Inspectors met with trust staff including the CEO of the trust, trust curriculum leaders and the regional director. They also met with the principal, vice-principals and senior staff, including those with responsibility for pupils with SEND.
- The lead inspector met with trustees and school governors.
- Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to: school improvement and governance, behaviour and attendance, alternative provision, the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum, pupils with SEND and the school's reading strategy. They also held meetings with staff with responsibilities in these areas.
- Inspectors reviewed Ofsted's staff survey, parent survey and pupil survey. They also spoke to groups of pupils, including single-sex groups.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: science, English, art, physical education, geography 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.
- Inspectors also carried out additional inspection activities for mathematics, including meeting with leaders, visiting lessons and looking at samples of pupils' work. They also carried out additional lesson visits across a range of subjects.
- 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

Bessie Owen, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
James Shapland	Ofsted Inspector
Tom Sparks	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Petrou	Ofsted Inspector

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