

Inspection of Essa Academy

Lever Edge Lane, Bolton, Greater Manchester BL3 3HH

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 October 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Without exception, every pupil who spoke to an inspector said that they are proud to attend Essa Academy. Pupils described their school as a happy, harmonious and safe place to grow and learn. They value the high-quality support that they receive from a wide range of skilled staff. Pupils were unanimous in their view that the school has improved considerably since the previous inspection.

Pupils said that bullying is rare. They described the effective support that they receive from staff should bullying ever occur. Pupils celebrate diversity. Essa Academy is a community underpinned by a culture of tolerance and respect.

Around the school and in lessons pupils behave sensibly. They wear their uniform with pride. Pupils talked passionately about the 'Essa Experience', which incorporates a uniquely planned programme of enrichment activities. For example, pupils benefit from comprehensive leadership experiences, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Cadets. Pupils have access to an extensive range of extra-curricular activities.

Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. They believe in the school's vision that all pupils must succeed. Pupils said that they enjoy the subjects that they learn. Across the school, all pupils achieve well.

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

Leaders, including trustees and governors, have taken effective steps to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. Leaders have created a strong, purposeful learning environment where pupils behave well and enjoy their lessons. In recognition of the positive changes that leaders have made, pupils' rates of attendance are now high and very few pupils are late for school. All pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make secure progress through the school's curriculum.

To create the right climate for learning, leaders have overhauled what is taught. While there is undoubtedly a broad and balanced curriculum in place, a few subject curriculum plans are not ambitious enough. This is because, with the best of intentions, leaders have incorporated additional enrichment activities into the main school curriculum at the expense of some academic subject content. Currently, in a minority of subjects, some pupils do not gain the rich body of knowledge that they need for key stage 4 and beyond. Leaders recognise this issue. They have already taken steps to ensure that the curriculum is suitably ambitious for September 2022. Leaders have committed to ensuring that the number of pupils following the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects at key stage 4 continues to rise.

Across the school, pupils benefit from teachers' solid subject knowledge. Teachers are passionate about ensuring that pupils apply themselves to their learning. That said, some teachers do not always choose the most appropriate activities to deliver

the knowledge that they want pupils to learn. This is especially the case in those subjects where the curriculum is still in development.

Teachers use a wide range of assessment strategies to check that pupils remember new knowledge and concepts. They also use this information effectively to address any misconceptions that pupils may have in their learning. Pupils value, and act on, the feedback that they receive from their teachers.

There is a keen culture of reading in the school. Those pupils that find reading difficult receive appropriate and timely support to catch up quickly. Across the school, teachers focus on developing pupils' subject-specific vocabulary and their reading skills. Typically, pupils said, 'We are always reading in lessons.'

Leaders are resoundingly successful in how they identify pupils with SEND. They pursue additional external support, including education, health and care plans, assiduously, when required. Staff are also skilled in adapting how they deliver the curriculum so that pupils with SEND, and those who speak English as an additional language, learn as well as their peers.

There is a well-planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme. Pupils enjoy this aspect of their learning. They develop a secure understanding of other faiths and cultures. Pupils also benefit from an excellent careers education programme that is interwoven into every subject.

Trustees and governors provide an appropriate level of support and challenge to leaders. Staff are incredibly positive about how leaders protect their workload and well-being. As a result, staff are happy and have the best interests of pupils at heart.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are proactive and responsive to local needs when considering the school's safeguarding arrangements. Pupils and their families benefit from a passionate, knowledgeable and effective pastoral support team. The school's PSHE curriculum is sensitively and carefully designed to educate pupils about staying healthy and safe. PSHE lessons help pupils to make informed choices, for example in relation to online safety and consent. Leaders' approach to dealing with sexual abuse and harassment is noteworthy.

Leaders have a strong relationship with local and national safeguarding partners. When required, pupils receive timely multi-agency support, including early help and mental health counselling. Leaders were particularly proactive in supporting pupils' well-being during the recent periods of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Currently, a small number of curriculum plans lack sufficient ambition for pupils at key stage 3 because too much emphasis is placed on enrichment activities within the main curriculum. As a result, some pupils do not develop the deep body of academic knowledge that they should in these subjects. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans in these remaining subjects are suitably ambitious and that they identify the precise knowledge that pupils must know and remember.
- On occasions, some teachers do not choose the most appropriate activities to deliver the knowledge that they want pupils to learn. This is particularly the case in those subjects that are in the final stages of development. Consequently, there are times when some pupils do not build their knowledge sufficiently well on earlier learning. Leaders should ensure that all teachers are suitably trained to deliver the revised curriculum, including in the remaining subjects that are under review.

The transitional arrangements were used on this inspection to confirm that pupils benefit from a good quality of 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	135770
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10204460
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1058
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Chris Read
Principal	Martin Knowles
Website	www.essaacademy.org/
Dates of previous inspection	15 and 16 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Essa Academy is part of the EFAT multi-academy trust (MAT).
- A new chief executive officer of the MAT was appointed in September 2021.
- The school has a very high proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The school makes use of two registered providers of alternative education for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 11 receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. Due to operational reasons, this inspection was carried out over three days.

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- As part of this inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and history. Inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited some lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils and teachers. Inspectors also reviewed the curriculum in art and design, the faculty of health, leadership, music, geography and science.
- Inspectors met with the principal and vice-principal, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and a wide range of teaching and support staff. An inspector spoke with the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, a trustee, the chair of governors and four other members of the local governing body.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from Year 7 to Year 11. Inspectors also observed pupils during breaktimes, lunchtimes and between lessons.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, the school development plans, self-evaluation documents, curriculum plans, minutes from meetings of the trustees and the governing body, and behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding procedures, including the checks made on staff. Inspectors met with leaders, staff and pupils to evaluate the culture of safeguarding. An inspector also checked the arrangements for pupils attending alternative education.
- Inspectors considered the 124 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and the 196 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils. Inspectors also considered the views of those parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. This included the comments received via the free-text facility.

Inspection team

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