

# A **BEST** Success Story

## #3 – Etonbury Academy: A School Improvement Journey



When Ofsted inspectors visited Etonbury Academy in Arlesey in February 2020, they were impressed with what they saw and gave a grading of 'Good'.

Just over two years prior, the previous inspection team had declared the school to be 'Requires Improvement'.

The turnaround was a huge accomplishment both for Etonbury – a school that has been at the heart of the community since 1955 – and the Bedfordshire Schools Trust.

Fundamental to this was BEST's appointment of Ian Evason as Principal. With a significant track record in leadership and improving the fortunes of schools, he was certainly the right person for the job.

Mr Evason introduced a remodelling that, as well as a Good Ofsted report, saw Etonbury recognised in 2020 as one of the country's Top 100 Performing and Improving Schools by independent report Government Initiatives IQ.

This is the story of Etonbury Academy's school improvement journey.



### ETONBURY AT A GLANCE

- 6FE extended secondary school (Year 5-11)
- 1,062 pupils on roll
- Set to become a 7FE secondary school in 2023 as part of two-tier reorganisation
- Plans include a new sixth form block





Leaders of the school and the trust have taken effective action to address the areas of improvement outlined in the previous inspection report

– Ofsted Inspection Report, February 2020

## It's the ETA Way...

The school's values are embedded by the ETA Way, which was devised by a working group set up to change the vision of the school:

**Everyone's respectful**

**Together we care**

**Always aim higher**



## Strong leadership helps Etonbury thrive at heart of the community

Having talented and successful leaders in place was a crucial aspect of Etonbury Academy's improvement journey.

Ian Evason, *pictured right*, was appointed Principal and, empowered by BEST's high autonomy model, he initiated a full restructure to move the school forward.

BEST Chief Executive Officer Dr Alan Lee said: "Quality leadership is critical to continuous improvement. We aim to recruit the most talented leaders to BEST, provide exceptional professional development and support them to deliver excellence.

"Ian and a number of top leaders, all with proven track records, have been recruited to Etonbury. Together, they have transformed practice, nurturing the very best in the wonderful children and staff we serve.

"Now, Etonbury is a thriving school at the heart of the community."

Mr Evason, who took up his post in the autumn of 2018, said the backing of BEST was a key factor.

He said: "The first year was very challenging, as we were going through the SLT restructure, and I had upped the ante on teaching and learning, behaviour and the general day-to-day running of the school.

"But we restructured and in the September there was a complete change of culture.

"The key bit was needing the backing of the trust, and BEST was really supportive, making sure we were doing the right things."

Trust assistance included significant investment in the site layout and staff resource – with other BEST schools keen to support by providing teachers in a number of specialist areas.

BEST's School Improvement team – including Alison Wilshaw, Helen Jameison and Amy Morris, Directors of Education, Maths and English respectively – worked closely with the core subject areas, while there was also pastoral and moderation support and valuable leadership CPD offered through the BEST Teaching School.

Mr Evason added: "I feel really supported by the trust. From a teaching and learning point of view we receive plenty of CPD and training for our staff to participate in.

"The operational side is really strong, which allows me, as a head, to concentrate on the day-to-day running of the school. It's 100% win-win."



## Pupil involvement key in school improvement

School leaders made sure the student voice was heard when introducing new measures at Etonbury.

Principal Ian Evason said: "We changed the behaviour policy which was the biggest thing for the children, they were involved in that quite heavily.

"Our new behaviour policy is fairly radical, but it works. For teachers, before they give any consequence, they have to have spoken to the child. Low-level issues do

not need to be formally recorded – dealing with them is just part of being a teacher.

"SLT are also on patrol regularly, and if there's any issues we'll go and support the teacher."

The views of pupils has continued to be integral to provision at the school – Etonbury has since been named runners-up in the 2021 Student Voice Awards run by VotesforSchools.





## What Ofsted inspectors said

- Pupils enjoy attending and feel safe... Leaders have ensured that the culture of safeguarding is strong.
- There is a culture of high expectation for all pupils.
- Leaders have designed a curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils.
- Leaders have acted quickly to improve the quality of education provision at key stage 2.
- Leaders have revised expectations of behaviour and attendance.
- Pupils say they like the new behaviour management policy. They appreciate being able to reflect on their actions and improve their behaviour.
- Leaders provide many professional opportunities for teachers and support staff, so staff continue to develop their skills.
- Governors have a strong overview of the provision. They regularly check the school's process for recruitment of suitable staff.

Read the report in full online at [reports.ofsted.gov.uk](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk)

**To get Outstanding would be 'wow' and the potential is here at the school to get that**

– Ian Evason,  
Principal

With school improvement a continuing journey plus sixth form provision on the horizon, the future is looking bright for Etonbury and the community. The school is working with Central Bedfordshire Council to develop plans for a sixth form block in 2023, as part of the wider area's two-tier reorganisation. Principal Ian Evason said: "Our job now is to work towards sixth form, that's really key for the community."

"Our students currently have to leave Year 11 and go elsewhere, but actually you should be able to walk to a sixth form – you shouldn't have to get on a bus." Mr Evason said another Ofsted inspection could be expected by then, too.

"I'm always talking to SLT in terms of getting ready for next year, what do we want to do, what our school improvement plan looks like," he said.

"If we went down the Ofsted criteria now we'd be in a good place, but pushing for more. If we were to get Outstanding that would be 'wow' and the potential is here at the school to get that.

"We've just got to keep the team here for this period of time. We've got ambitious members of staff – any of our pastoral middle leaders could step up on to an SLT."

He added: "We've done a lot of succession planning right from the start, though. Some of the younger staff we've got are shadowing the heads of year, so if one of those go they're ready to step up."

BEST Chief Executive Officer Dr Alan Lee said: "As a prized member of the BEST family, I fully expect Etonbury to gain an Outstanding inspection grade next time."

### WHY THIS IS A SUCCESS STORY...

- School and trust working in partnership on school improvement journey
- Strong leadership taking school to next level
- Great example of the benefits of a school being part of a multi-academy trust
- Etonbury continuing to serve needs of community with future provision plans

