

The Hastings Academy

Rye Road, Hastings, East Sussex TN35 5DN

Inspection dates

30–31 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a rapidly improving school. The principal has transformed the school since his recent appointment, by raising the whole school community's expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Parents, staff and pupils all agree that there has been a sharp improvement in all aspects of school life.
- Exceptional leadership and a clear sense of moral purpose at all levels drive strong ambition.
- The University of Brighton Academies Trust provides good support and challenge to school leaders.
- Pupils are proud to belong to The Hastings Academy and are now thriving and making good progress in the new ambitious culture.
- Parents are extremely positive about their child's experience at the school. The school is over subscribed.
- Teaching has improved rapidly. The principal has acted swiftly to recruit and retain good teachers.
- Leaders have made sure that reading is a priority. Pupils read regularly and many say they love reading.
- Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils are very well supported and so make the same or better progress than other pupils.
- Pupils are happy and say they are safe. The school's safeguarding procedures are highly effective.
- Leaders make very good use of achievement information to check on pupils' progress. They take prompt action should they find any underachievement.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved markedly. Their behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. They are polite, well mannered and courteous.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disability are supported well and make good progress. The speech language and communication unit is very effective in meeting pupils' communication needs.
- There are small pockets of less effective teaching, particularly in English, because teaching does not match pupils' needs well enough.
- Leaders know that there are still improvements to make in boys' reading and writing skills.
- Most-able pupils are not always given work that challenges them enough.
- While attendance has improved, there are still a small number of pupils who do not attend regularly enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by
 - ensuring that all teaching, especially in English, matches that of the best
 - ensuring that most-able pupils are routinely challenged to tackle more difficult work
 - continuing to improve the literacy level of boys.
- Improve the attendance of all pupils, especially those that are persistently absent.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal's determination that all pupils, especially those that are disadvantaged, have a first-rate education, is unwavering. Together with his equally committed vice-principal, they inspire the highly motivated leadership team to strengthen and rapidly improve the school. Many parents, staff and pupils remarked the school has transformed since the last inspection.
- In April 2017 the principal was appointed permanently. Together with the vice-principal, he wasted no time in overhauling and improving school policies and procedures. Pupils gave their opinions about how they would like their school to be and as a result 'The Hastings Academy Way', a charter for success, was developed. The charter provides key features of successful learning and teaching and has successfully provided the blueprint for improvement. All areas that needed to improve from the last inspection have been tackled well.
- Leaders are exceedingly honest and tenacious in seeking out areas that need further improvement. Consequently, school leaders have an accurate and insightful view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Plans for improvement are clear. Leaders monitor improvements through sharp analysis of pupils' progress information. Self-evaluation procedures in the school are very effective in moving the school forward.
- Senior leaders have developed a culture of high ambition for staff and pupils. Staff say that leaders support them well and value their work. Morale is high. Leaders have developed a strong moral purpose that drives staff to do the best for their pupils. Middle leaders are effective in leading groups of teachers. A cohesive team ethos is apparent among all staff. As a teacher said, 'We have been given the tools to do our best.'
- At the time of the last inspection staff recruitment and retention was a significant problem for the school. Because of the improvement in staff morale and a drive to recruit good teachers, the principal has successfully stabilised staffing.
- Leaders make sure that teachers are held stringently to account for the progress their pupils make. This was not the case in the past. This revised approach is understood well by staff and contributes to improved pupil progress.
- Parents say that the school is well led and managed. They have a high regard for the principal, senior leaders and staff at the school. The school is now oversubscribed. Parents are happy with the education their child receives. The online survey shows that overwhelmingly parents would recommend the school to others. One wrote, 'After a difficult time The Hastings Academy is becoming a source of pride to the local community,' and another said, 'The pupils feel valued and in turn seem to want to achieve the best they can, which is all I have ever wanted for my child's education.'
- Leaders make exceptionally good use of the extra funding for pupils that are disadvantaged or who have not reached the required level in literacy and numeracy on entry to the school. There is an extensive range of closely targeted support so that pupils who are disadvantaged or have literacy and numeracy gaps make great gains. Pupils who are disadvantaged have experiences that inspire them to learn well.

- The University of Brighton, the academy's sponsor, and the University of Brighton Academies Trust support the school well. Among other support, expertise from the trust is used to support teaching and learning. Staff speak positively about the opportunities provided by the trust.
- The curriculum has been developed so that pupils can study appropriate courses and achieve well. At key stage 4, pupils have a choice from a variety of subjects. Leaders ensure that pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain and pay particular attention to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and visits locally and abroad. Pupils are particularly keen to attend music, arts and sports activities. A lunch and a breaktime music club are attended well. The large numbers of pupils who attend show a complete commitment and passion for music. Pupils explain they have ample opportunity to perform publicly in locations around Hastings.
- School leaders are determined to be an inclusive school and they avoid making permanent exclusions. Pupils with extreme behavioural difficulties are provided with extensive support, care and guidance. A few pupils may have a modified curriculum, including an alternative provision placement that better meets their needs.
- The school's provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties makes a significant difference to the life chances of the pupils who attend. The centre provides a haven of calm for pupils who may also have autistic spectrum disorder. Importantly, the centre provides excellent support and training to teachers so that pupils can access mainstream classes. The work carried out to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is very well led and managed.

Governance of the school

- The University of Brighton Academies Trust provides effective support and expertise to the local board.
- The trust retains a tight overview of standards and progress and calls school leaders to account well. All local board members and executive leaders from the trust are determined to support and challenge school leaders to improve school outcomes, especially for disadvantaged pupils.
- Local board members visit the school regularly to check improvements for themselves. They carry out their duties diligently, particularly when monitoring safeguarding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has a strong safeguarding ethos. Pupils' welfare has a high priority in the school.
- Staff are well trained in safeguarding matters. They understand the risks that pupils may face and the need to be vigilant. There are clear procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns.
- Leaders ensure that the school complies with all statutory requirements and regulations. Procedures when recruiting staff are exemplary and meticulous records are kept.

- Pupils say that they feel safe and know whom to go to should they have a concern. Leaders have made sure that pupils know how to stay safe online, including providing hard-hitting messages during an assembly about the dangers of cyber bullying. Staff and parents agree that pupils are safe.
- Staff liaise effectively with alternative providers to make sure that pupils educated there are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good because teachers use similar teaching and behaviour-management methods across the school. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils respond positively to a consistent approach and they say that teaching is much improved. Parents say that their child is taught well.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements. This helps them to develop activities that are mostly well matched to pupils' learning needs and capture their interests. Pupils usually participate well and remained focused on learning.
- Teachers know their pupils well. Teachers find out how well their pupils are doing through questioning and looking at pupils' work. Pupils usually respond positively to their teachers' feedback and are keen to improve their work.
- Improving literacy is a key focus for the school. Teachers promote subject-specific language well. There is a school-wide push to improve reading skills. Pupils read regularly and many have developed a love of books. Pupils who are disadvantaged have extra support and they read with pride. There is palpable excitement among pupils to read.
- There are significant strengths in teaching across subject areas. In mathematics, pupils are challenged to think deeply and use skills to solve problems systematically. In science, pupils write accurate explanations of scientific topics such as osmosis or electric current. In drama, pupils show an exceptionally mature focus to perform well. Pupils participate well in languages because teaching enables them to have a go at speaking. There are numerous examples of strong teaching.
- Leaders have identified that the quality of teaching in English needs further attention. While there is some strong English teaching identified, it is not yet consistent across all year groups. Teaching does not always match the pupils' needs so pupils may have work that is too easy or too hard. The most able pupils are not consistently challenged to produce their best work.
- Teachers set homework regularly to promote home learning. Most parents say that pupils have appropriate homework for their age.
- In a small number of classes across a range of subjects, work is not pitched at a high enough level to enable all pupils, including the most able pupils, to make rapid enough progress. On rare occasions, pupils lose focus when they are not fully interested in their work. Leaders know where teaching is variable and in most cases, this is related to staff turnover in the past.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Leaders have placed the well-being of pupils at the heart of the school's work. Staff encourage courteous, tolerant and respectful attitudes effectively. The school is a calm and peaceful environment in which to learn. Pupils are happy at school.
- Pupils who are unable to attend mainstream lessons because they have been ill or have emotional difficulties are supported well. These pupils attend an on-site specialised nurture unit so they do not fall behind. Pupils are appreciative of this support.
- Pupils get on well with their peers. They report that bullying is rare. They are confident that should they have any concern it would be dealt with effectively. Most parents also confirm that the school deals with bullying well.
- Typically, pupils are keen to learn and have positive attitudes towards school. Pupils' books are free of graffiti and they do not drop litter. Pupils are proud to belong to their school.
- The pupils who learn at off-site alternative providers attend well. This is because there is close liaison between school leaders and these providers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. School leaders have developed clear behaviour management systems. Staff and pupils say that pupils' behaviour has improved rapidly. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. At social times pupils socialise together happily in groups. They are punctual to lessons.
- As school expectations about pupils' behaviour tightened up, fixed-term exclusion rates increased to above the national average in the recent past. Pastoral leaders support pupils well with modifying behaviour that does not meet the required standard. Currently, exclusions are reducing because pupils have adapted their behaviour to meet the new expectations.
- While pupils' attendance rates have improved, rates of absence are above national averages. In particular, a greater proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged are persistently absent. Leaders have liaised with parents and supported them to encourage pupils to come to school more regularly. The school's information shows that their work is beginning to have a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils' rates of attendance.
- Leaders have ensured that there is a high level of staff supervision during breaktimes, lunchtimes, before and after school. Staff deal with a very few instances of boisterous behaviour at lunch and breaktimes swiftly and effectively.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Generally, pupils enter the school with levels of attainment below the national average,

although current Year 7 pupils' prior attainment is close to the national average. Current pupils, whatever their starting points, make good progress in many subjects.

- Results in 2017 were a disappointment to the school, despite having improved from the previous year. Leaders' precise analysis has identified areas of underperformance, which reflected the turbulence in staffing that pupils experienced during key stage 4.
- Nevertheless, 2017 exam results showed clear improvements in almost all performance measures, especially the progress of most-able pupils.
- Leaders have introduced ambitious targets for pupils currently in the school. The school's information shows that pupils' attainment and progress are improving strongly. The assessment of pupils' work is moderated with other schools, so leaders are confident about the accuracy of information about current pupils' progress.
- Inspection evidence including lesson observations and work scrutiny reflect the trend of improved progress and attainment suggested by the school's assessment information. All subjects show improvement. Current progress is particularly strong in music, physical education, languages and mathematics.
- While progress is improving across the curriculum, there are a few pockets of less strong progress in some subjects. Leaders are well aware of these relative shortcomings and are supporting teachers to intervene so that pupils' rates of progress increase in these areas.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, including those who attend the speech and language centre, make good progress. Leaders share their impressive knowledge about pupils with teachers so lessons precisely meet pupils' needs.
- Disadvantaged pupils are increasingly doing well. Leaders' support and intervention is having a sizeable impact so that many disadvantaged pupils are making accelerated progress from their starting points. The differences between disadvantaged pupils and those of others is diminishing.
- Most-able pupils, including most-able disadvantaged pupils, are not consistently challenged with harder work. This is particularly the case in English. As a consequence, most-able pupils are not always making the very high standards of which they are capable.
- The school's determined efforts to improve the literacy skills of pupils across the curriculum are showing success. In particular, pupils who enter the school with low reading ages make strong progress to catch up. Individual case studies show remarkable improvements in their reading skills as a result of targeted support.
- Despite the school's best endeavours, there are still some boys who struggle with their reading and writing. School leaders are well aware of the need to intensify support for improving the literacy skills of identified boys.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision, for all or part of their curriculum, achieve well. Those that attend full-time provision gain appropriate qualifications and have a clear pathway to further education.
- Pupils are well prepared for life after school. Pupils say that they appreciate the impartial careers advice and guidance. In 2017, almost all pupils went on to further education, employment or training.

School details

Unique reference number	136401
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10040930

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	863
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Chris Pole
Principal	Stuart Smith
Telephone number	01424711950
Website	www.thehastingsacademy.org
Email address	office.tha@hasla.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 January 2016

Information about this school

- The academy is part of the University of Brighton Academies Trust. It works in close partnership with St Leonards Academy and they share the same local governance board.
- The principal was appointed, after a short period as acting principal, permanently to the role in April 2017.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils supported by pupil premium funding is well above the national average.
- The school currently meets the government's floor standards for achievement at key stage 4.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. The school accommodates a specialist resource centre for a small number of pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties, which is funded by the local authority.

- Around 40 pupils, of whom 31 are part time, attend alternative learning providers including Personalised Foundation for Learning, College Central, Education Futures Trust, YMCA, Plumpton College and Sussex Coast College.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the principal, vice-principal, senior leaders and middle leaders. The inspector also considered 49 responses from staff to Ofsted’s staff questionnaire.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing board and four members of The University of Brighton Academies Trust.
- Telephone calls were made with alternative learning providers.
- Inspectors considered 228 responses from parents to the online questionnaire. An inspector met a parent.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 45 lessons. The principal or senior staff accompanied the inspectors during most observations.
- Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of disadvantaged pupils’ work across the year groups and subjects. Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, and inspectors spoke with a number of pupils during the inspection.
- The lead inspector visited the specialist centre for pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties and spoke with pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents, including: the school’s self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; analysis of the school’s performance information; information relating to the behaviour and attendance of pupils; safeguarding and child protection records; and minutes from trustees’ and local governors’ meetings.

Inspection team

Sue Child, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Scott Norman	Ofsted Inspector
Jennifer Bray	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Storey	Ofsted Inspector

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