

# Inspection of a good school: The Highcrest Academy

Hatters Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP13 7NQ

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Inspection dates:

11–12 February 2020

## **Outcome**

The Highcrest Academy continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at The Highcrest Academy happily live up to the school's motto of 'aspire and achieve'. They feel that staff care for them well. The school has a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations and are encouraged to try their best and support each other.

Behaving well in lessons and around school is the norm for pupils. They are enthusiastic learners. Many pupils relish presenting their knowledge or opinions to the rest of the class, or taking part in interesting debates. Speaking in front of others is a regular part of school life. This helps pupils to build their confidence.

Around school, pupils get on well with each other. Pupils feel safe in school and understand who they should talk to if they are worried about something. Bullying does not happen often. On the rare occasions bullying does happen, staff deal with it well.

Clubs and activities outside of school time are popular. School productions and plays attract many willing pupils, as do after-school clubs. Pupils enthusiastically join sports teams and attend clubs such as science and drama clubs or football and netball teams.

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

Leaders have worked hard to improve the curriculum. In most subjects, curriculum leaders have sensibly set out when pupils will learn subject content and the knowledge they should acquire. However, in some subjects in key stage 3, the knowledge pupils should acquire and the order in which they need to do this are not set out precisely enough. In a few subjects, such as English, some pupils complete work that they already understand. Leaders are aware of this and are taking appropriate action to ensure that the curriculum is planned well in all subjects.

Leaders and governors base all their decisions on how they can provide pupils with a high-quality education. They are determined to increase the proportion of pupils studying

English Baccalaureate subjects. Leaders have been successful in this over the past two years. Steadily increasing proportions of pupils now study these subjects.

Curriculum planning for some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is not precise enough. Curriculum leaders have planned how the curriculum will be adapted for pupils with SEND. However, in a small proportion of subjects, the curriculum is not adapted well enough. This means that not all pupils with SEND do as well as they could. Leaders have begun the process of improving the curriculum for these pupils.

Most pupils achieve well across a range of subjects. Teachers' strong subject knowledge helps them to plan interesting lessons. They explain concepts and knowledge to pupils very clearly. As a result, pupils increasingly remember more over time. For example, in science, across year groups, pupils practise how to conduct experiments. Year 8 pupils learned about electromagnetism. They then built an electric motor using what they had learned. Pupils said that this helped them to remember how the principles of electromagnetism apply to motors.

Over the past three years, the proportion of students attending the sixth form has increased. Students benefit from teachers' adept explanations and a well-planned curriculum. Students quickly gain the knowledge and skills they need to understand difficult concepts. There is an ambitious curriculum in the sixth form. Students achieve very well in their A-level examinations. They also do well in the BTEC National Diploma courses that the school offers.

Pupils are extremely positive about their school. The school's extended curriculum makes sure that pupils have a wide range of opportunities. Pupils also feel listened to. Some join the school council so that they can represent others' opinions. There is an extensive careers provision between Year 8 and Year 13. Pupils have access to impartial careers advice. They also take part in events involving leaders from local and national industries. In Year 12, students take part in courses organised by employers. These include learning about internships and visiting foreign countries on fact-finding trips. The school's high-quality careers provision means that pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their education.

Staff feel very well supported by senior leaders. According to staff, they feel valued because senior leaders are approachable. They respond positively when staff raise issues with them. Staff and leaders work together to find solutions, particularly if staff are concerned about their workload.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff receive effective safeguarding training. The school has a strong safeguarding culture where every member of staff takes responsibility for pupils' safety. Local external agencies are contacted if pupils require extra help and staff liaise with

other agencies well. This ensures that vulnerable pupils, and particularly children looked after, get any extra help they need quickly.

The checks that are necessary to ensure the suitability of staff are carried out rigorously. Governors support leaders in monitoring these checks so that they are assured that procedures are followed correctly.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In most subjects, the curriculum is precisely sequenced so that pupils build up their knowledge and understanding over time. Leaders have made a concerted effort to improve their curriculum plans. Although leaders are in the process of ensuring that the curriculum is well planned and sequenced across all subjects, this is not yet fully the case in key stage 3. Consequently, in a small number of subjects, some pupils do not develop the deep understanding they need. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans detail the knowledge pupils need to acquire, and the sequence in which it is taught, in all subjects.
- Leaders are in the process of improving the provision for pupils with SEND, and have made good progress in this area. However, current provision for these pupils is still not as strong as it could be. Pupils with SEND do not always do as well as they could because leaders have not yet adapted all areas of the curriculum sufficiently well. Leaders need to build on the improvements they have made so that all pupils with SEND progress well through the curriculum.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged The Highcrest Academy to be good.

## **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 Ofsted Parent View information 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136858
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10122248
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	998
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	170
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Susan Jollands
<b>Principal</b>	Glen Burke
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.highcrestacademy.org.uk">www.highcrestacademy.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	17 March 2016

## Information about this school

- The principal joined the school in September 2016.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

## Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with the principal, senior and curriculum leaders, and governors.
- On the first day of the inspection, we did deep dives in these subjects: science, mathematics, modern foreign languages and English. This meant that in each subject, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, talked to pupils, visited lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at pupils' work.
- We considered the views of staff from three meetings with groups of staff and from the 69 staff who responded to Ofsted's confidential questionnaire.

- We reviewed safeguarding records, including the central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- We considered the views of 77 parents who responded to the confidential Ofsted parental questionnaire and 43 parents who provided free-text responses.
- We considered the views of 301 pupils who responded to Ofsted’s confidential pupil questionnaire.

### **Inspection team**

Harry Ingham, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Patrick Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

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