

Inspection of Helen Allison School

Longfield Road, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent DA13 0EW

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 June 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where pupils are welcomed and feel valued. Leaders and staff support pupils to achieve more than was thought possible. All staff have high expectations of their pupils. Pupils say that the school helps them overcome their difficulties. As one pupil said, 'This school has helped me to think straight.'

Helen Allison School is a calm, purposeful and happy place for pupils to be. Safeguarding procedures are firmly established, and pupils have confidence that adults will help to keep them safe. Specialist therapeutic intervention, as well as day-to-day behaviour support strategies, are effective. Pupils are proud to regulate their own behaviour with increasing consistency and success.

Pupils learn to get on well with each other. They say that bullying is not a problem and are confident that any concern will be dealt with and helpfully resolved by staff.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about what the school does for their children. One parent, summing up the views of many, said, 'Our child has made phenomenal progress since joining this school.' Constructive relationships between parents, the school and other agencies are a key strength.

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

Governors and leaders have a strong vision to provide education for pupils that will equip each one with the knowledge and skills they need for their future. Since the last inspection, the new principal has established an effective leadership team who constantly review their development plans and actions. This has led to significant improvements in all areas of the school. The principal is relentlessly positive and encourages all staff to believe that pupils can achieve highly. Staff have a high regard for senior leaders because they feel valued. Leaders have made everyone's roles and responsibilities clear and workload is kept under review. As a result, staff's morale is high and they enjoy working at the school.

Leaders and all staff know pupils very well. They check each pupil's education, health and care plan carefully to ensure it is ambitious and comprehensive. They construct precisely each pupil's curriculum, including numerous trips and visits into the community.

Teachers and teaching assistants are expert at understanding how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They monitor and assess pupils' learning and well-being very closely. Teaching staff and therapists speak together constantly about how to adapt teaching strategies to best suit each pupil. While staff skilfully guide pupils' personal development, teaching does not always deepen and extend pupils' learning as far as it could.

Case studies show that pupils' behaviour associated with their SEND improves dramatically when they join the school. Teaching is rarely disrupted due to pupils' behavioural issues. Pupils are keen to learn and participate well in the life of the school. Senior pupils are excellent role models for younger pupils. Expert therapeutic professionals together with teaching staff provide activities so that pupils regulate themselves prior to a learning session. Parents speak highly of such activities, including online therapy sessions during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic when some pupils' learning was at home.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn how to manage their feelings and relationships so they can interact in a positive way with others. They are taught to understand others' points of view and differences between people, including protected characteristics. As one pupil said, 'Everyone is welcome here, a pupil would be welcome in a wheelchair or if they had a different faith.' Other aspects of the personal development curriculum, such as being healthy and keeping safe, are expertly designed and delivered.

Because of a well-planned curriculum in many subjects and highly effective personal and behavioural support, pupils achieve well. Pupils attain a range of qualifications appropriate to their ability. In subjects such as personal and social education, reading and mathematics, knowledge has been broken down so that teaching builds on what was previously learned. However, as yet, this is not the case in all subjects. Leaders are aware of this and are currently developing subjects, such as history, to ensure the whole curriculum is well sequenced.

Leaders make sure that reading is a pivotal area of learning across the school. Teachers encourage pupils to read outside of their areas of interests. Teaching promotes early reading skills through an effective phonics programme that builds pupils' knowledge of letters and sounds. Teachers keep a close eye on pupils' reading skills and provide extra support when required.

Pupils make a smooth transition into the school's sixth form. Leaders tailor programmes of study to include academic and vocational opportunities, such as construction, motor vehicle or hair and beauty courses. Pupils' participation in work experience increases their confidence and widens their personal skills effectively. Valuable careers advice also helps pupils plan their next steps.

The local governing body provides challenge and support to the leaders of the school. This is supported by the director of education from the National Autistic Society. Strengthened governance has made a substantial contribution to improving the school so that the independent school standards and all equality duties are met consistently.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding has a high priority in this school. Regular discussions about pupils' welfare enable all staff to be vigilant and report any concerns they may have. Staff are well trained and are knowledgeable about safeguarding issues. This includes any additional risks that pupils with autism spectrum disorder may encounter.

The designated safeguarding lead has made sure that records are kept meticulously and that every effort is made to keep pupils safe.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have developed the curriculum in the core subjects, including mathematics, personal and social education and reading, so that pupils' learning builds on what has gone before. More work is still to do in the foundation subjects to match the careful planning seen in other subjects. Leaders should ensure that the last remaining areas of the curriculum to be developed are planned and implemented as well as the rest.
- The teachers and teaching assistants make an effective teaching team. However, pupils would benefit more from additional teaching strategies that challenge them to think more deeply about some of the topics studied. Leaders should work with staff to ensure they can identify how pupils' understanding can be deepened as much as possible.

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

School details

Unique reference number	118993
DfE registration number	886/6046
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10193097
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	72
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	27
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	National Autistic Society
Chair	Janet Corcoran
Principal	Simon Collins
Annual fees (day pupils)	£51,469 to £85,128
Telephone number	01474 814878
Website	www.autism.org.uk/helenallison
Email address	helen.allison@nas.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 to 31 January 2019

Information about this school

- Helen Allison is a special school, run by the National Autistic Society, offering full-time education to male and female pupils between the ages of five and 19. The school is registered for up to 83 pupils. The school is situated on two sites on the same road, the main school and The Hub. The Hub caters mainly for older pupils.
- The school provides education for children and young people with autism spectrum disorder.
- The school uses Rowhill School and Hadlow College as providers of alternative learning to supplement the curriculum.
- The school's last full integrated inspection was in January 2019 when it was judged inadequate and independent school standards were found to be un-met. In October 2019, an additional inspection found that un-met standards were now met.
- The current principal was appointed in July 2019, prior to the additional inspection. The assistant principal and special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCo) have been appointed since October 2019.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the managing director from the National Autistic Society and the chair of the local governing body.
- We met with the principal, deputy and assistant principals, the SENDCo and other members of staff.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, personal and social education and history. After a meeting with subject leaders, lessons were visited and pupils' work was scrutinised. Discussions were held with pupils and their teachers.
- We met parents at the school gate. We considered the responses from Ofsted's online questionnaires completed by staff, parents and pupils.
- We visited an alternative learning provider and spoke with a member of staff.
- Staff recruitment records and safeguarding documents were checked. We met with the school's designated safeguarding lead. We held a telephone conversation with a safeguarding officer from Kent local authority.

- A range of school documents were scrutinised, including action plans, risk assessments and attendance records. We reviewed the school website.

Inspection team

Sue Child, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Deborah Gordon

Ofsted Inspector

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