

Inspection of The Holmesdale School

Malling Road, Snodland, Kent ME6 5HS

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 July 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Inadequate

What is it like to attend this school?

The Holmesdale School is a purposeful community where pupils and staff work together well. Pupils appreciate the ambition that staff show for them and the determination with which they have improved the school and continue to improve the education they receive. They like the fact that there is always someone who will listen and help if needed. This helps them to feel safe.

Pupils are proud of their school and the 'ECCO' values of engagement, community, character and ownership. These values can be seen enacted throughout the school, for example in the respect that pupils show for each other. Pupils recognise how much behaviour has improved throughout the school. This includes greatly reduced instances of prejudiced language or bullying. They are adamant that these behaviours are not welcome at their school and are confident that staff deal with them well.

The majority of parents and carers are happy with the school. Many commented on the rapid improvements since the arrival of the current leadership team. Inspectors saw what one parent described as 'fantastic relationships' between teachers and pupils. Many parents commented on the care and concern shown by staff for pupils and families, especially during the pandemic.

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

Leaders have systematically improved the school. They have created a calm and respectful school community. Leaders have established clear expectations. Everyone knows what is expected of them and are confident that they will be supported to achieve it.

Leaders have successfully improved the quality of education across the school. They recognise that there is further work to do to ensure that it is consistently of the quality they expect. All pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum.

Plans for each subject area are suitably ambitious, with activities set out thoughtfully to help pupils learn more and remember more over time. These are particularly well used in the sixth form. However, for Years 7 to 11, the delivery of these plans is not consistently strong. For example, leaders have introduced the requirement for a task at the start of each lesson so that teachers can check what pupils remember about a topic. While teachers include this activity in their lessons, some do not use the information to help them to work out what pupils know and what they need to learn next. Consequently, some learning is too hard or too easy for some pupils. This hinders their progress across the curriculum.

Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is also varied. Much information is recorded for each pupil with SEND and staff know them well. Many teachers make general tweaks to their lessons to support individual

pupils. However, teachers do not routinely adapt lessons to meet pupils' specific needs.

There is a focus on reading throughout the school. In lessons, teachers promote subject-specific language and some subjects use 'guided reading' activities designed to develop pupils' vocabularies. However, work to support the weakest readers lacks rigour and urgency.

Pupils' behaviour is good overall. Leaders have established high expectations and staff provide very effective support that helps to motivate those who might struggle. Prior to the pandemic, leaders had improved pupils' attendance, but this has worsened following the recent partial school closures. In particular, too many pupils are persistently absent. There are encouraging signs that leaders' actions to address this are starting to work.

The 'ECCO' values have helped to provide a focus for pupils' wider development. This is a strength of the school and especially the sixth form. Recent work to develop students' oracy has been very successful, culminating in rousing speeches by sixth formers as part of the school's democratic process to elect school ambassadors.

The work of leaders and staff to teach pupils about healthy relationships is well-considered. Pupils in all year groups recognise the importance of this learning. They appreciate the ways that staff listen to their needs and help them to prepare for life in modern Britain. This work is helping to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

Staff have ensured all Year 11 pupils have plans for next year. Although these pupils are no longer attending school, staff are still making routine 'welfare phone calls' for some.

The school is well led and managed. Leaders have a clear vision and staff are proud to be part of the team transforming this school. While leaders' oversight of reading and provision for pupils with SEND has not had the rigour required, leaders understand what is needed. Support from the interim executive board and the supporting multi-academy trust has been consistent and effective.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have a strong understanding of potential risks faced by pupils. They have regular training and checks of their knowledge to ensure that they keep safeguarding at the forefront of their work. They follow the agreed processes for reporting any concerns about pupils.

Leaders review all concerns methodically and act swiftly when needed. They work very well with external agencies and families.

Pupils are confident that there is always a member of staff who will listen and act if they have any worries. They learn how to identify potential risks and keep themselves safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have established ambitious intentions for the quality of education. In the most successful subject areas, these are realised through carefully sequenced and delivered series of lessons. However, this implementation is not consistently strong across the school. Leaders should ensure that all learning is planned and taught to the standard they intend so that pupils learn more and remember more across the curriculum.
- Knowledge about how best to support pupils with SEND in the classroom has not been shared effectively with teachers. Currently, teachers are making general adaptations to support these pupils. These can be useful. However, teachers and teaching assistants need to have greater knowledge of pupils' specific needs and how best to adapt lessons to meet these needs. Leaders need to ensure that pupils with SEND can fully access their learning and make progress across the curriculum.
- Leaders have promoted reading across the school. They have invested in commercial programmes to support reading and to help the weakest readers. However, the focus on these pupils has not been urgent enough. Leaders need to prioritise this work so that all pupils, but especially the weakest readers, become confident readers who can participate fully in lessons and are prepared for adult life.
- Since the partial school closures due to the pandemic, pupils' absence, particularly persistent absence, has worsened. Leaders are using a wide variety of strategies to address this. They must continue this work so that fewer pupils miss school.

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 [here](#).

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	118796
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10184660
Type of school	Secondary (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	490
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	27
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Nigel Blackburn (Chair of Interim Executive Board)
Headteacher	Glenn Prebble (Head of School)
Website	www.holmesdale.kent.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- New senior leaders, including the head of school and the designated safeguarding lead, have been appointed since the monitoring inspection in July 2018. Following that inspection, the local authority commissioned Swale Academies Trust (SAT) to support the school. The head of school is supported by an executive headteacher from SAT.
- There is a new chair of the interim executive board (IEB) and new members, including a representative from the local authority.
- Leaders did not recruit students to the sixth form in September 2019, so there are currently no students in Year 13.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Year 11 were not attending the school at the time of the inspection.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the head of school and executive headteacher, the head of sixth form, the special educational needs coordinator, the designated safeguarding lead and other senior leaders. They also met with subject leaders, pastoral leaders, teachers and teaching assistants.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the IEB and a representative from the local authority who sits on the IEB.
- The inspection team spoke to pupils from every year group about the school.
- Inspectors took account of the 129 responses by parents to Ofsted's Parent View, including 52 written responses. They considered the views of staff from conversations and the 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding by reviewing leaders' knowledge, recording and actions. This included looking at documentation, including the school's single central record and a sample of case files. Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead and spoke to pupils, staff and the chair of the IEB about this aspect of the school's work.
- Inspectors did deep dives into these subjects: English, mathematics, science and languages. This involved discussions with the leaders of each of these subjects, visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils and teachers from the lessons visited about the subjects.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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