

Inspection of an outstanding school: Hitchin Boys' School

Grammar School Walk, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1JB

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 September 2021

Outcome

Hitchin Boys' School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy their time at school. They care about each other and get on well with staff and with their peers. Pupils are polite and respectful. They bring to life the Hitchin Boys' School values of respect, teamwork and kindness.

Staff have very high expectations and want the best for all pupils. Consequently, pupils behave extremely well and feel safe. No one in the school community tolerates unkind words or acts against others. Bullying is rare. Pupils know that if bullying does happen, staff deal with it effectively and promptly. The school is a calm place for pupils to learn and be themselves.

Pupils attend a variety of clubs and activities. Staff make sure that the experiences are accessible to everyone.

A large proportion of students choose to continue their studies at the school's sixth form. Students are confident it is the best choice for them. They have access to a wide range of different subjects, many as a result of the school being part of the Hitchin Sixth Form Consortium.

Parents are highly supportive of the school. They say the school looks after their children well. One parent exemplified the views of many, stating, 'From the teaching to the support that is given, I wouldn't want my son anywhere else.'

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

The headteacher and his team have maintained an outstanding school. Their vision for the school is shared widely among all staff. There is a passion to develop pupils both academically and as well-rounded British citizens.

The school's curriculum is highly ambitious for all pupils. It is designed very well and ensures pupils not only learn rich subject knowledge, but also grow in their awareness of

the world around them. For instance, leaders place great value on English. Pupils learn key concepts, logically and step by step. The subject allows pupils to experience a wide and varied range of texts from different cultures. English is also used to spark wider debate about, for example, political viewpoints.

Curriculum leaders across all subjects have planned and sequenced learning so that pupils develop securely, and deepen, their knowledge over time. In mathematics, for instance, the frequent recapping of prior learning allows pupils to apply concepts effectively to more complex problems. Similar levels of consideration of what pupils need to learn, and when, is a consistent feature of subject planning.

Curriculum leaders adjust their curriculum plans swiftly when they need to, such as in response to gaps in pupils' learning as a result of the pandemic.

Teachers have a thorough understanding of the subjects they teach. Teachers choose appropriate activities that promote learning and engage pupils' interest. Debate and discussion are actively encouraged. From Year 7 to the sixth form, pupils feel safe to share their opinions and ideas. They are well behaved and enthusiastic about their learning. Pupils develop a rich understanding of the subjects they study.

Remote education is blended effectively into many lessons. This supports pupils if they are absent. It allows pupils to look back at what they have learned and helps them remember important knowledge.

Leaders have thought carefully about how assessment is used. In class, teachers use effective checks and tests to identify when pupils do not understand an idea. Teachers give prompt feedback to help all pupils with their learning.

Pupils read widely. They access a variety of high-quality texts across many subjects. The library contains a wide range of books for all abilities. Leaders have clear processes for identifying pupils who find reading tricky. These pupils benefit from targeted support to help them with their reading. As a result, they catch up quickly, with many able to access the same challenging books as their peers.

Leaders accurately identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers use information from 'pupil passports' to make well-considered adjustments to their lessons. This means that pupils with SEND have full access to leaders' outstanding curriculum and achieve very well.

In all year groups, pupils access a carefully planned, high-quality 'personal development' curriculum. This supports pupils to become active, respectful citizens. Issues such as mental health awareness, relationships education and character building are introduced in an age-appropriate way. Staff do not shy away from discussing difficult issues. Additionally, leaders have planned a well-considered careers programme. Sixth-form students, for example, experience a detailed programme of support and advice sessions to help them with their next steps.

Staff are proud to work in the school. They have access to effective professional development that supports them with their teaching. Staff say that leaders consider their workload and well-being. One member of staff told inspectors, 'Being here has made me a better teacher.'

The headteacher and governing body are clear about how to make the school even better. They readily accept advice and support from others, including the local authority. They have high ambitions for pupils and staff alike.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Throughout the school, there is a strong safeguarding culture. Leaders have ensured that staff, at all levels, are trained and vigilant in spotting safeguarding concerns. There is an ethos of 'it could happen here'.

There are clear procedures to report concerns about pupils. Staff, at all levels, know the systems well. Leaders work closely with a range of agencies to provide effective additional support and early help to those pupils who need it.

Staff raise awareness of safeguarding risks to pupils. Pupils know how to keep safe whether at school, in the community or online.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in January 2016.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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

Unique reference number	139154
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10199509
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1287
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	298
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Helen Corkill
Headteacher	Fergal Moane
Website	http://www.hbs.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 January 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up his post in September 2020.
- The school uses full-time alternative provision for a small number of pupils at the North Herts Education Support Centre in Hitchin.
- The school is part of the Hitchin Sixth Form Consortium, with two other local secondary schools.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, staff and trustees (including the chair of trustees).
- The lead inspector held a telephone call with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, English, modern foreign languages, computer science and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors viewed a range of safeguarding records, scrutinised the single central record and spoke to the designated safeguarding leader.
- Inspectors considered 323 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 257 free-text comments. In addition, inspectors reviewed 106 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 615 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

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