

Inspection of a good school: The Hemel Hempstead School

Heath Lane, The Hemel Hempstead School, Heath Lane, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP1 1TX

Inspection dates:

12 and 13 October 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at The Hemel Hempstead School get a high-quality education. They develop the knowledge they need to achieve well in all subjects. This is the same for all pupils.

Pupils are keen to learn. As a result, they concentrate in lessons. Pupils say that they behave well because they understand what they are learning. Behaviour is also calm around the school site. Most pupils say there is no little or no bullying. Pupils describe the prompt and helpful way staff deal with their concerns. Pupils say this makes them feel safe at the school. Despite this, some pupils use unkind language towards each other, both in school and outside, which leaders do not always know about.

Pupils understand and follow leaders' vision of the 'Hemel Hempstead experience', which provides pupils with many opportunities to improve their personal development. Pupils lead in many areas of school life. For instance, pupils manage the library and the basketball team. All pupils are encouraged to take part in activities. For example, the most disadvantaged pupils get golf lessons and go to the opera.

Pupils say they are happy at the school because their welfare is carefully supported. Parents and staff agree with this.

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

The curriculum is well planned. Leaders identify the most important knowledge and skills that pupils should learn. Leaders make sure that pupils' learning builds on what they already know. For example, teachers check what pupils know when they join key stage 3, or the sixth form, and identify and teach to any gaps. Because of this, pupils confidently apply what they know in a range of contexts and situations. For instance, Year 11 history

pupils explain how the compromises Elizabeth I made in her religious policies set an example for society today.

Leaders are ambitious to provide a high-quality education for all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), for example, benefit from these high expectations. Leaders ensure staff know appropriate strategies to help pupils with SEND. Teachers adapt the curriculum effectively if these pupils need help to understand and access it. Consequently, pupils with SEND, like their peers, show that they know more and can do more over time.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They show skill in teaching the vocabulary specific to their subject. In the sixth form, teachers carefully help pupils to make links between different areas of their learning. In the few cases where teachers are not subject specialists, leaders ensure they get appropriate training and support.

Leaders prioritise reading. Pupils discuss and evaluate the books they read. When pupils who join the school are behind in their reading, they get the support they need to catch up.

The curriculum is effective in improving pupils' personal development. Leaders ensure that all pupils are well prepared for their next steps and to be successful in the wider world. During the pandemic, leaders have ensured pupils still get opportunities to widen their experiences. Parents praise the considerable range of opportunities their children receive.

While there are positive aspects to pupils' behaviour and attitudes, leaders do not carefully check on the nature of behaviour incidents. In particular, leaders do not find out about how some pupils regularly use harassing language. This could have the potential to lead to pupils feeling unsafe. Leaders tell pupils about the harms of this kind of talk, through assemblies and the curriculum. But pupils say that if leaders asked them more about what goes on, then the school would be able to address this better.

Similarly, although safeguarding is effective overall, leaders' attention to the recording of safeguarding arrangements is not as thorough as it should be. Leaders do not have clear processes in place to ensure that all the information about safeguarding cases is easily shared. Leaders are aware of this and plan to address it.

Staff say that leaders support them in their roles. Staff are grateful for the range of training they get to help them develop. They say leaders consider their workload, and this helps their well-being.

Governors have reviewed their work to ensure they all understand the strategic nature of their role. They have the skills and knowledge they need to hold leaders to account. For example, there have been some examples of how governors have monitored leaders' work on safeguarding and behaviour effectively. Governors monitor leaders' work on the curriculum closely. Governors understand the barriers leaders face. They offer both support and challenge appropriately to help leaders overcome these.

In discussion with the headteacher, inspectors agreed that the rigour of safeguarding processes, and leaders being proactive in finding out about pupils' experiences of harsh language, may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have trained staff well so that they know how to keep pupils safe. Staff make regular contact with vulnerable pupils if they are studying at home or at alternative provision. Leaders have clear plans for those on part-time timetables so that they return to full-time provision as soon as possible.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' attention to the recording of safeguarding arrangements is not rigorous. While this has not led to pupils being unsafe, leaders would have more assurance of their safeguarding with clearer systems and more thorough recording. Leaders need to improve the clarity and rigour of their safeguarding processes.
- Leaders do not carefully check on the nature of behaviour incidents. As a result, pupils feel that more could be done to address the harsh and unkind language some pupils use towards their peers. Leaders should put processes in place to find out about the types of language pupils experience, so they can address the issue more effectively.

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 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 third section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2011.

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

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| Unique reference number | 117500 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10199763 |
| Type of school | Secondary Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1260 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 256 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Graeme Snell |
| Headteacher | Neil Hassell |
| Website | www.hhs.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 17 May 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The headteacher has been in role since 1 September 2018.
- The school places a small number of pupils in one alternative provider, Dacorum Education Support Centre.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other leaders, staff, pupils and those responsible for governance.

- English, science, history, geography and art were considered in detail to evaluate the quality of education. Inspectors carried out meetings with subject leaders, visited lessons, had discussions with staff and pupils and looked at pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including the school improvement plan, curriculum plans and school policies.
- Inspectors reviewed the 144 responses that were submitted by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and also considered the 95 free-text responses from parents. They also considered 90 responses to the Ofsted staff survey and 220 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

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