

Inspection of The Skinners' School

St John's Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9PG

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Ofsted has not previously inspected The Skinners' School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged The Skinners' School to be outstanding, before it opened as an academy. From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections.

Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened in The Skinners' School's effectiveness before and after it converted to academy status.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have a deep pride in The Skinners' School. They talk passionately about what the school offers them. They are very happy with how their teachers help them to learn well. As pupils travel through the school, teachers challenge them more and more. Staff's expectations of what pupils can achieve are especially ambitious for older pupils.

Leaders make sure that the school is not just about academic achievement. Pupils enthusiastically take part in the many and diverse range of activities on offer. Older pupils help staff to run clubs and societies. Prefects make a strong contribution to school life.

The school deals very well with bullying. Leaders take a strong approach that parents and pupils value. They make sure they resolve issues to prevent them happening again. Pupils behave very well around the school and in almost all their lessons. They understand the school rules and respect them. Pupils are routinely respectful and polite.

Many parents commented on how much their children have gained from their education. As one parent wrote, 'We love being part of the school community and think the school is doing an excellent job.' Pupils, without doubt, thrive and are safe at the school.

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

Leaders have planned out carefully the whole school curriculum. Subject leaders are knowledgeable and expert in the development of the learning. Within each subject, they have made sure that the curriculum is increasingly ambitious for the pupils. By key stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils and students acquire deep knowledge across a range of subjects. There is an exceptionally high take-up of English Baccalaureate subjects for GCSE. Leaders ensure that pupils read widely to further support the depth of their learning.

Teachers' excellent subject knowledge supports pupils to extend their understanding very effectively. Teachers routinely ask older pupils to explain what they know. They use skilful questioning to prompt and extend pupils' thinking. Those pupils who respond show high levels of articulacy and grasp of content. However, some pupils do not regularly take part in these class discussions. They are attentive and industrious, but teachers do not challenge them to develop their thinking through active debate. Where the learning is most successful, all pupils explore their ideas to a sophisticated level.

Younger pupils make progress, but it is not always as strong as it is for older pupils. For instance, in the sixth form, where teachers are very ambitious for students, they gain extensive and thorough knowledge. Students can apply that understanding very well. At key stage 3, some teachers do not consistently and precisely set out what

pupils should be learning or check carefully enough that they have learned. Teachers do not always guide pupils enough so that they know how to improve further. This means that, on occasions, some pupils do not make the progress in their learning that they should.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive thoughtful and individualised support. This is provided outside the classroom. Staff in the SEND team have identified clearly what each pupil requires to be successful. However, subject staff do not always use recommended strategies in class. As a result, pupils with SEND are not all able to make the best progress.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are very strong. Their high levels of attendance and punctuality reflect pupils' positive attitudes towards learning. All relationships in the school show mutual respect. The boys behave in a mature way towards each other. In almost all classes, pupils work in a purposeful way. Occasionally, pupils' behaviour falls below this standard. This happens when the teachers' skills are not fully secure.

The personal development of pupils is a major part of the school's work. Clubs and societies abound. Sport is an important part of the offer but there are plenty of other interests pupils can pursue. The number of clubs and societies conveys a university atmosphere. Leaders make sure that pupils receive high-quality impartial careers advice. They have taken a courageous lead on open discussion of challenging topics such as sexual identity. As one pupil said, 'There is a very reflective culture here'.

Staff are very pleased with the way leaders support their well-being. They are very proud to work in such a welcoming and professional community. Leaders make sure that staff receive relevant training in areas such as safeguarding and pastoral topics. However, leaders do not systematically plan and deliver training for teachers to improve their practice. Governors are thoughtful and focused. They work well with the headteacher and other leaders to improve the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding culture at the school is well developed. Staff are alert to local threats. They make sure that they look out for any signs that suggest pupils may be at risk of harm. Staff exchange information in a timely way. Leaders take action swiftly.

Leaders, overall, carry out all the necessary recruitment processes for anyone who comes in to work at the school. However, leaders had failed to carry out some important checks. These were quickly dealt with during the inspection. Nonetheless, governors and leaders need to be more thorough in their practice so that systems work without fail.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not make it explicit and precise what they expect pupils to learn, or use formative assessment to provide clear guidance to pupils about how to improve. This is especially true within key stage 3. As a result, pupils do not all achieve as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that teachers have the training to help them improve their practice in these key areas so that pupils make better progress in gaining knowledge and skills.
- Some pupils with SEND are not receiving the necessary support within their classes. Therefore, they are not able to make the progress in their learning that they should. Leaders need to insist and monitor that there is consistent attention to support for these pupils within each subject.

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	140595
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10199438
Type of school	Grammar
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1114
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	323
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	William Cohen
Headteacher	Edward Wesson
Website	http://www.skimmers-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 June 2007

Information about this school

- The Skinners' School is a selective school for boys.
- The headteacher joined the school after the last full inspection.
- The school works with Tonbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School to offer sixth-form students access to courses in both schools. Up to 30 female students therefore study one or more A levels in The Skinners' School.
- The school fully meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school currently uses alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history, geography, drama and religious studies. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work. Inspectors also reviewed curriculum plans.
- Inspectors reviewed the school’s safeguarding arrangements. They looked at relevant documentation, staff recruitment checks and training. They also considered how well adults in the school act on emerging concerns about pupil welfare.
- Meetings were held with leaders and trustees, including the chair of the trustee board.
- The team spoke with staff and pupils to gather their views. They considered 453 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View, including 307 free texts. Inspectors also took account of 87 responses to the staff survey. There were 200 replies to the pupil survey which were also considered by inspectors.

Inspection team

Yasmin Maskatiya, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Stuart Edwards	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Culling	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Paul Murphy	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Haynes	Her Majesty’s Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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