

# Inspection of Hills Road Sixth Form College

Inspection dates: 1–4 February 2022

## Overall effectiveness

**Outstanding**

---

The quality of education	<b>Outstanding</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Outstanding</b>
Provision for students with high needs	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Information about this provider

Hills Road Sixth Form College (HRSFC) operates on a single site on the southern edge of Cambridge. There are approximately 2,640 level 3 students aged 16 to 19. There are 13 students with high needs. Approximately two-thirds of students come from Cambridge partner schools. The remaining student intake comes from independent schools and from schools beyond Cambridge.

The college offers 35 A-level subjects, including the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). Science and mathematics attract the largest number of learners. HRSFC maintains its curriculum breadth by supporting small class sizes in specialist subjects, such as dance, Latin, history of art, German and geology.

HRSFC students have a higher-than-average GCSE profile on entry to the college. Most students progress to university, including many to the most competitive higher education providers.

## **What is it like to be a learner with this provider?**

Students value the highly ambitious and inclusive college community. Staff promote mutual respect and equality relentlessly. Students say that it is a privilege to study at HRSFC. They enjoy studying alongside other like-minded students who challenge and inspire them.

Students have a strong work ethic and dedicated focus to achieve the very top grades of which they are capable. They are proud to take ownership of their learning. They attend extremely well. They make the very best use of high-quality resources, study spaces and lunchtime workshops to achieve high grades. They say that teachers want them to succeed and support them to do so.

Students enjoy leading and taking part in a broad range of inclusive societies and enrichment activities. Staff encourage students to become active and responsible citizens. Students take part in social action projects, such as raising money for charity, or taking part in climate change initiatives. Students have a good understanding of fundamental British values. They value the student council and recognise this as an example of democracy.

Students say that teachers have exceptionally high expectations for how they interact with each other. They say that staff consistently challenge inappropriate comments and behaviours. In turn, they teach students how to self-regulate and challenge each other.

Students have high levels of understanding about sexual abuse and controlling behaviours. Tutors teach them how to respond in such situations. Students feel safe and know how to access support from the well-being team, specialist tutors and teachers.

## **What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders have developed a highly ambitious, inspirational and effective curriculum that extends well beyond the high academic expectations they have for students. Leaders place the students at the centre of their planning. They provide students with a wealth of enrichment opportunities that are highly effective in building students' character in preparation for their next steps. Students with high needs access these activities too, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at gold level. These diverse and inclusive activities enable students to be mentally and physically healthy while striving for academic excellence. For example, some computer science students choose to take part in badminton enrichment to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Other students choose a creative outlet, such as film club, where they engage with film scripts and gain transferable skills in creative writing.

Students benefit from a rich and extensive curriculum. Leaders include the EPQ as a vehicle to develop students' ambitions and wider skills. Students pursue their personal interests and flourish in doing so. Leaders have planned the EPQ

curriculum and resources around a framework of independent skills development. Students produce a project plan, checklist, timeline and work diary. They develop high levels of time management, self-discipline and skills in research, academic writing and communication. As a result, a small proportion of students gain unconditional offers at the university of their choice, because of the unique and exceptionally high standard of the projects they produce.

Leaders have taken decisive and highly effective action to support students' well-being to enable them to excel academically. Leaders are sensitive to the challenging workload and high expectations placed on their students. They have invested extensively in specialist tutors, whose role is to support students to cope with such a demanding curriculum. Additionally, the support tutor system allows subject teachers to focus on using their teaching and academic expertise to further enable students' success.

Leaders' quality management is relentless and purposeful in driving and securing improvements. They monitor a broad range of indicators, such as data, feedback, assessment outcomes and lesson visits. They take swift and decisive action to identify underperformance and implement focused action plans. At the start of the pandemic, leaders recognised the need to improve and accelerate digital learning across the curriculum. They provided staff and students with technology to remove any barriers to implementation. They provided training, support and time for staff to develop their practice and resources. Leaders quickly identified good practice, software and innovations to produce a plan to reform the curriculum. As a result, teachers are adept and creative in their use of technology to support learners to make exceptional progress. They use technology skilfully to provide students with frequent assessment and feedback. Staff have developed high-quality digital resources that support independent learning for all students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders have successfully created a reflective culture that values professional development, discussion and sharing of practice, ideas and resources. They listen carefully to feedback from staff and students and respond swiftly with actions for improvement. Leaders have set up focus groups with staff and students, such as the staff well-being group, the student council and a student personal relationship focus group. Leaders have implemented well-received initiatives in response to feedback. Leaders introduced external markers for the EPQ to reduce the workload for staff. They gathered student feedback to refine tutorial topics relating to healthy personal relationships.

Teachers benefit from extensive and valuable professional development training, such as inclusive learning, digital learning and growth mindset approaches. They review their curriculum frequently to ensure that it is meeting students' learning and progression needs. For example, in computer science, staff chose to change to the C# programming language to better support their students' progression to higher education and employment.

Leaders encourage and achieve extremely high levels of collaboration with parents and carers. Leaders recognise the considerable benefits of involving and informing parents in their decision-making and student progress monitoring. Leaders are swift to involve parents to resolve any concerns or agree support plans. Parents of students with high needs are rightly positive about the support provided by the college, not only academically but also for the well-being of their young person.

Teachers are enthusiastic, skilled and highly qualified in their subjects. Students value the experience and expertise of their teachers. Teachers use their knowledge and skills successfully to inspire and motivate students. They have developed a curriculum that is coherent and well sequenced, and that prepares students thoroughly for higher education and employment. Teachers provide students with opportunities to learn from experts or external bodies, such as the French Institute or the Medical Society. In biology, a visiting speaker provided a lecture on 'Sequencing COVID – how do we do it and why bother?'. Consequently, students gain a deeper understanding of their subjects and how they impact on society.

Students take ownership of their learning to make sustained and significant progress over time. They understand the need to extend their studies outside the classroom to achieve higher grades. Students make very effective use of the wide variety of academic resources that teachers provide, such as resources to illustrate learning points and quizzes with auto-marking. Teachers have created an extremely calm, harmonious and orderly learning environment. Students listen diligently to one another and challenge different viewpoints appropriately. They use self-assessment and peer assessment constructively to critically review each other's work.

Students have an excellent understanding of their subjects and the progress they are making. They can recall information when required and apply it to complex situations. In economics, students are confident in discussing complex ideas, such as the difference between gross domestic product and gross national income.

Teachers and managers assess students' knowledge and skills thoroughly at the start of their course. Teachers use assessment outcomes to identify any further learning needs and adapt their lessons accordingly. They provide detailed, constructive feedback to encourage students to aim for high grades. Teachers embed mathematical and English skills purposefully into curriculum sessions. For example, in biology, teachers signpost students to the mathematical skills that they need, such as percentage calculations. Students act on teachers' feedback and value the challenge provided to support their development.

Staff are highly proficient and extremely proactive in planning the curriculum for students with SEND. Staff use assessment information and education, health and care plans very effectively to devise strategies and coordinate specialist support. Students with high needs are supported exceptionally well to integrate with their group and gain confidence in their ability. Teachers make purposeful adjustments to enable students with SEND to be highly successful and fulfil their potential.

Students benefit from a well-considered careers programme that includes individual careers appointments, engagement with employers from a wide range of sectors and mock interviews. Students receive unbiased and independent information that cover progression to university, apprenticeships and employment. Tutors prioritise impartial careers advice and provide ongoing application support for students, including those with high needs. Consequently, students are well prepared for their next steps. They know the full range of opportunities available to them. Most students progress to the top universities and aspire to work for the highest performing companies.

Governors have a broad range of skills and experience, which enables them to be highly effective when supporting and challenging senior leaders. They have a thorough knowledge of the college's strengths and areas for further development. They provide the impetus and support to enable leaders to make sustained improvements, such as in estates development or funding support for vulnerable students. They rightly have confidence in the ability and ambition of the senior leaders.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Students feel completely safe in college. They know whom to talk to if they are concerned about themselves or others, and they feel empowered to do so. Students trust their tutors and well-being staff. They are confident that any referrals they make would be treated seriously and respectfully.

Leaders, governors and staff take safeguarding extremely seriously. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements for students are extremely well resourced and well managed. Managers monitor referrals frequently and effectively to identify trends and further support and training needs, and to act on lessons learned. The high levels of staff resources reflect the increase in the number and complexity of safeguarding concerns being presented to them.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130615
<b>Address</b>	Hills Road Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB2 8PE
<b>Contact number</b>	01223 247251
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.hillsroad.ac.uk">www.hillsroad.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal</b>	Jo Trump
<b>Provider type</b>	Sixth-form college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	2 November 2006
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

Penny Fawcus, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Michael Worgs	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lynda Brown	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Gartland	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Richards	Ofsted Inspector

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

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for students of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2022