

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Skinners' Kent Academy

Sandown Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 4PY

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Inspection dates:

22 and 23 February 2022

## **Outcome**

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding 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?**

This is a school where all pupils are welcomed and supported, whatever their background. It is a very diverse community, held together by extremely strong, shared values. Relationships are exceptionally strong.

Leaders act with great integrity, and staff have high aspirations. They are determined that all pupils can access the curriculum and that there is a broad range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. As one pupil said, summing up her school experience with emotion, 'They really want me to do well.' Across the school, teachers are making great strides in closing gaps in pupils' learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mostly, teachers equip pupils with the subject-specific vocabulary they need to articulate their thinking. The focus on high-quality writing across all subjects is not as strong. Teachers encourage pupils to ask questions and see the point of what they are learning. Pupils learn how they might use what they are studying in later life. This helps them to make informed choices for the future.

Pupils behave well. Staff tackle any poor behaviour quickly and consistently. There is very little bullying, but if it happens, leaders deal with it effectively. This is a calm and orderly school where pupils feel safe.

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

Governors and school leaders are exceptionally ambitious about what pupils will learn, not only academically. They have mapped out a programme over the seven years of schooling to develop character and turn out well-rounded students by the end of Year 13. They want every child to be able to speak a foreign language by the time they leave the school.

Almost all pupils take the full set of academic subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate. This is well above the national average.

Curriculum leaders have worked out in detail what pupils will learn and when. They plan content logically from Year 7 to Year 13 so that pupils learn things in the right order to make sense of what comes later. For example, in history, sixth-form students interpret the domestic policy of American presidents by using knowledge of the Cold War gained at GCSE.

Senior leaders ensure that teachers are experts in their subjects. They have refined the quality of staff's training to build on specialisms. Teachers understand how the curriculum builds pupils' learning over time and give pupils excellent feedback along the way. They carefully consider what pupils have understood and remembered, and what they need to revisit or move on to next.

The pandemic disrupted pupils' learning considerably. Many pupils fell behind, particularly in subjects such as modern foreign languages where they missed 'in person' speaking and listening with their teachers. Teachers and pupils have worked hard to catch up on lost learning, but, nonetheless, there is more to do.

Leaders closely track the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. When teachers identify that individual pupils require extra help, they adapt work well. If needed, teachers provide additional support so that all pupils can access the curriculum. Leaders have set up a separate classroom, known as the EHub, to support pupils whose attendance or motivation is weak. This has reduced absence and re-engaged those pupils in their learning.

Reading is well supported, including reading for pleasure. The school's 'reading army' successfully encourages younger pupils to read more widely. Sixth-form volunteers help raise the profile of reading with Year 7 pupils. In the main, teachers follow the school's literacy policy closely in making sure that pupils learn and remember the most important vocabulary in their subject. This helps pupils to think deeply about their learning and reap benefits in how they express themselves. By the time they reach the sixth form, students discuss ideas expertly and eloquently. Teachers do not pay the same attention to always insisting on high-quality writing across the curriculum. As a result, some pupils' written work lacks fluency and accuracy.

Pupils behave well in school. Leaders track this carefully. Some younger pupils needed help to re-establish good habits when they came back from lockdown. Leaders acted quickly to restore the high quality of behaviour that existed before. Pupils' mental health is a priority and staff support it well.

The school offers a good variety of clubs, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and cadets. These were interrupted by the pandemic but are now opening up again. The school's 'GPS' programme offers pupils comprehensive advice on social and moral issues. Pupils receive high-quality careers guidance. The sixth-form curriculum strongly supports students' decisions about their next steps, including university places and apprenticeships.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors provide wise, well-judged oversight of safeguarding. Experienced, highly trained leaders provide exceptional direction and advice. They ensure all staff are alert to risks. Teachers and support staff diligently follow procedures. Their mantra is 'safe rather than sorry'. School leaders have strong relationships with the local community. The school uses external agencies well, for example in supporting pupils with their mental health.

Pupils feel confident that staff are there for them. There is a strong level of trust built on excellent relationships over time. The school has responded well to alleviate some of the additional challenges to pupils' well-being during the pandemic.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The teaching of writing is not equally strong across all subjects. As a result, pupils' written work is not always of the standard it could be. Leaders should ensure that all staff adhere to the school's literacy policy and insist on consistently high-quality writing from pupils.

## 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 June 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135888
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10212539
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,100
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	132
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Sarah Stallebrass
<b>Principal</b>	Hannah Knowles
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.skinnerskentacademy.org.uk">www.skinnerskentacademy.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	8 and 9 June 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The principal took up her post in September 2020.
- This is a non-selective school in an area with many selective schools. It is an International Baccalaureate World School. The number of pupils on roll has almost doubled since the last inspection.
- The school uses three registered providers of alternative provision for a small number of pupils.

## 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the principal and her senior team. The lead inspector also met academy trustees, sponsors and governors, some via a remote link.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, history, science, French and design technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaktimes, before and after school and spoke to them informally in the playgrounds.
- The lead inspector visited the school's 'EHub' and looked at literacy work across some other subjects.
- The lead inspector scrutinised safeguarding records, including the checks made by the school when it employs staff. He met with the designated safeguarding leads for the school and the multi-academy trust. He looked at how staff make safeguarding referrals and spoke to a variety of teachers and support staff.
- Inspectors looked at 174 responses by parents to Ofsted Parent View and read all the free-text comments, as well as some letters sent in by parents during the inspection. They considered responses from 90 staff and 224 pupils to the Ofsted online surveys.
- The lead inspector scrutinised other relevant documents, including information available on the school's website.

### **Inspection team**

Keith Pailthorpe, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Peter Rodin

Ofsted Inspector

Catherine Old

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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