

Inspection of Harris Academy Merton

Wide Way, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 1BP

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 September 2022

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected since September 2012.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders are ambitious for all. They have very high expectations of pupils in every subject. All pupils learn the rich curriculum exceptionally well. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Over half of pupils opt to remain in the school sixth form, where they can study a range of academic and vocational subjects.

Leaders ensure that the school is a calm and orderly place. Behaviour is excellent. Pupils explained that the clear rules help the school to be a safe and happy place. They also know that leaders' expectations enable them to focus on their learning. The rare instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively by leaders and staff.

Leaders regularly seek and act on the views of pupils and families on how to improve the school further, from the curriculum to how behaviour is managed. This year, for example, Spanish has been introduced to the curriculum as a result of pupils' feedback.

The culture of ambition extends beyond the classroom. Leaders think carefully about how to support pupils' character development and promote positive attitudes to learning. They also encourage pupils to take up wider interests through a broad enrichment programme, which includes sporting, musical and creative activities. Participation in extra-curricular opportunities is high and pupils are keen to make the most of what is on offer.

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

Leaders are persistent and thorough in their approach to making sure that all pupils achieve to a high standard. Every pupil is expected and supported to succeed. To meet their ambition for pupils, leaders have created an aspirational curriculum across the full range of national curriculum subjects. The sixth-form curriculum is rigorous and caters for a range of needs and interests. Students pursue academic and vocational courses with enthusiasm. They are exceptionally well supported in their studies.

Leaders regularly review how well pupils are learning and remembering the curriculum, including those pupils with SEND. They are quick to pick up and respond to anything that could be even better. Leaders' sharp oversight plays a key role in ensuring that pupils consistently gain and remember detailed knowledge in each subject.

Each element of leaders' curriculum design comes together to help pupils get better at a subject. Subject leaders consider carefully what knowledge pupils need to learn.

They are also meticulous in deciding the right point for pupils to learn and revisit this knowledge.

Leaders ensure that teachers are well trained and experts in teaching their subjects. It is clear that leaders and staff focus on removing any barriers to pupils' success. Teachers check understanding and ensure that pupils recall their previous learning fluently and accurately. This helps pupils to progress, step by step, towards reaching demanding curriculum goals.

Pupils who arrive needing help to improve their reading are quickly identified. They receive effective extra help, for example through small, targeted groups and additional reading practice, such as paired reading with older pupils. Alongside studying a diverse range of carefully selected texts in English, leaders provide plentiful opportunities for pupils to read widely. Pupils are guided to choose suitable reading books. All of this reflects leaders' work to embed a love of reading across the school.

Leaders' vision for personal development is centred on promoting pupils' character. They have devised a curriculum that aims to educate pupils for life in the 21st century. Pupils learn about British values as part of a rich programme of personal, social and health education. Pupils are taught to respect diversity and difference, and staff expect pupils to treat each other kindly and with respect. Poor behaviour, including incidents of discrimination, is not accepted, and any incidents are dealt with promptly.

Leaders ensure that high-quality wider opportunities are available for all. In Years 7 to 9, every pupil takes part in a carefully planned range of enrichment activities during the school day. Dozens of optional clubs before and after school are also on offer, and these are well attended. The careers programme is well planned and includes visits to employers and universities. Sixth-form students receive support to ensure that they make ambitious choices that reflect their potential.

Pupils are focused in lessons. They attend well and arrive punctually. They know what leaders and staff expect of them and their successes are celebrated regularly, for example through assemblies.

Parents and carers of pupils with SEND are regularly invited in to discuss the needs and learning of their children. Leaders constantly review how well pupils with SEND are achieving. Their needs are expertly identified and catered for.

Staff feel well supported with workload. They have access to effective professional development, and school leaders make astute use of the trust's expertise to enhance both the curriculum and teachers' professional development.

The trust board and governing board both play a strong role in holding leaders to account. The boards are also closely involved in promoting close partnerships with families, including throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established strong systems to ensure that pupils in need are identified and supported promptly. They consider a wide range of issues when doing this, including attendance. Staff are well trained and vigilant. They know how to report concerns. Leaders secure help through staff on site, including the school's early help team. They also work effectively with external agencies to support and protect pupils who are at risk.

Pupils learn how to stay safe through the taught curriculum. Leaders take on board pupils' suggestions to make sure that curriculum content is relevant and helpful to pupils' lives. Pupils know how to report concerns. They like that the school has different ways for them to share concerns, for example by using a 'worry box' or sending an email to leaders.

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.

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	131897
Local authority	Merton
Inspection number	10212820
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	1,411
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	238
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sir Dan Moynihan
Principal	Aisha Samad
Website	www.harrismerton.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 September 2012, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, a new principal has been appointed.
- Leaders make use of two alternative providers, both of which are registered as schools.
- Careers guidance meets the requirement of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded 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 leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the principal, and other members of the leadership team. They also spoke to trustees and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: science, English, geography, physical education and languages. 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 also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects and visited other lessons.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally to find out about their views on school life, including how leaders and staff promote their well-being and high standards of behaviour. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at social times and during lessons.
- In considering safeguarding, inspectors met with pastoral and safeguarding leaders, spoke to staff, considered the single central record, and met with governors. Documentation related to safeguarding and behaviour was reviewed.
- The responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff, pupils and parents were also considered.

Inspection team

Alice Clay, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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