

Inspection of a good school: Robertsbridge Community College

Knelle Road, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5EA

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 September 2022

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Robertsbridge like and trust their teachers. They know their teachers want the best for them. Pupils enjoy their lessons and value the nurturing and friendly atmosphere which pervades the college. The school's motto 'success through partnership' is exemplified through the strong relationships evident between teachers and pupils.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs. These include sports clubs, arts clubs and frequent opportunities to go on trips, both locally and abroad. Many pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. There are lots of opportunities for pupils to develop independence and leadership skills by taking on roles such as transition buddies, subject ambassadors and senior leaders.

Staff and pupils recognise the recent improvements in pupils' behaviour overall. However, some pupils and parents remain concerned about bullying. Pupils know who to speak to in school if they need support, but they are not always confident that teachers and leaders will ensure that unkind behaviour does not continue. Most pupils feel safe in school. However, some feel uncomfortable about the boisterous behaviour which sometimes takes place outside of lessons, such as in corridors and the lunch queues.

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

The curriculum is broad and well planned. Leaders have recently lengthened the key stage 3 curriculum to provide pupils with a stronger foundation on which to build their knowledge and skills. Pupils can choose from a wide range of options at key stage 4. Leaders recognise that more pupils would benefit from studying a more ambitious curriculum as represented by the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). They have been successful in increasing the number of pupils studying humanities subjects, but too few pupils currently take languages.

Lessons are mostly calm and purposeful and pupils are keen to learn. Leaders have thought carefully about the knowledge and skills they want pupils to acquire and in what order. Staff are equipped with strong subject knowledge to help them emphasise the essential content. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, pupils were successfully supported to analyse how Dickens creates sympathy for Oliver Twist. However, in some lessons, teachers do not carefully check that pupils have grasped the important knowledge and skills which means that learning is not always secure. Consequently, leaders' ambition for pupils to learn consistently well in all subjects is not always realised.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) follow the same curriculum as their peers and most keep up well in lessons. The special educational needs coordinator provides staff with detailed information so that they can adapt learning for pupils with SEND appropriately. Pupils in the specialist 'Da Vinci Centre' successfully access main school lessons and benefit from tailored therapeutic interventions. Some parents of children with SEND feel that provision is not sufficient for their child's needs.

Leaders have ambitious plans for developing reading in the school. Pupils' reading needs are carefully identified and specially trained staff support those needing extra help. The new 'Reading Café', designed to encourage a love of books, is almost ready to open and pupils are excited about using it.

Pupils' personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons help them to develop their wider understanding of the world around them. They cover a wide variety of topics related to relationships, keeping safe and careers. The programme is strong and has been carefully designed to enable current affairs, such as the war in Ukraine, to be slotted in. PSHE lessons are supplemented by 'employability skills' sessions where pupils look more deeply at career choices and financial management, for example. This prepares pupils well for their next steps.

Senior leaders have worked hard to stabilise the school after a period of turbulence in leadership. A number of initiatives have been put in place which are beginning to bear fruit. Staff value leaders' consideration of their well-being, professional development and workload. Governors are loyal and committed to improving the school still further.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders' highly organised systems and effective communication with staff ensure that pupils are kept safe. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular, comprehensive safeguarding training. This equips staff well to be alert to the potential risks that pupils may face. Staff are vigilant. They know how to spot the signs of abuse and know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils.

Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families get the timely support that they need.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from risks through the PSHE programme. Pupils know who to go to if they need support or advice.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum for many pupils is not ambitious enough. Leaders have been successful in increasing uptake in some EBacc subjects, such as humanities, but the number of pupils studying languages remains low and is not increasing quickly enough. Leaders should take action to ensure that more pupils study languages in key stage 4.
- Leaders' ambition for pupils to learn consistently well in all subjects is not realised. Consequently, pupils' learning is variable between different subjects. Leaders should ensure that staff check that pupils' learning of essential content is secure.
- Leaders have already done some effective work to tackle bullying and boisterous behaviour. However, this remains a prevalent concern for some pupils and parents. Leaders should evaluate their current approaches and take decisive action so that pupils' confidence that concerns will be dealt with is increased.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2017.

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	114588
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10211343
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	754
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Karen Marr
Headteacher	Zak Vice
Website	www.robertsbridge.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	1 February 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Robertsbridge is smaller than the average-size 11 to 16 mixed school.
- The current headteacher joined the school in January 2019.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for up to 12 pupils with SEND. Pupils who attend this provision also access lessons in the main school. The primary needs for pupils who attend the provision are autism spectrum disorder and dyslexia.
- The school supports alternative provision for a small number of pupils at three registered education providers.
- The school 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.

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.

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, pupils, the chair of the governing body and six other governors. An inspector had a telephone call with a senior manager and the deputy head of children’s services at the local authority. An inspector also had a telephone call with a member of staff at two alternative provisions.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, geography and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work. An inspector also visited lessons in some other subjects.
- Through discussions with leaders, governors, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how effectively pupils are safeguarded. They also viewed the school’s website and policies. They looked at records related to safeguarding, including checks on adults working at the school.
- Inspectors spoke to staff, including early career teachers, about behaviour and their workload in school.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils and staff through the responses to Ofsted’s confidential surveys. The views of parents were considered through the 256 parent responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered views from four adults who sent individual emails to Ofsted.

Inspection team

Paula Sargent, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Paul Gibson

Ofsted Inspector

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 learners 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.

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/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: 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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022