

Inspection of an outstanding school: Highbury Fields School

Highbury Hill, London N5 1AR

Inspection dates:

27 to 28 September 2022

Outcome

Highbury Fields School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff have extremely high expectations for all aspects of school life. One parent or carer reflected the views of many, saying, 'the school focuses on the holistic child'. For example, pupils take part in termly activities such as enterprise days, team building days and 'women in tech' workshops. These events build pupils' ambition and confidence.

Pupils take part in a wide range of visits. Leaders connect these to the curriculum so that pupils extend their learning. For example, after reading a novel by Charles Dickens, pupils visited Dickens' house. Leaders ensure that pupils can take part in activities that are often new to them. These include archery, climbing and sailing.

Pupils are proud of their school. They enjoy school and feel safe. They are well cared for. Pupils act respectfully towards staff and other pupils. Bullying is rare and when it does occur leaders take action.

Throughout the school pupils are keen to volunteer to support the school and others. Older pupils act as peer mentors and younger pupils help with school events. Pupils learn about and celebrate their own and others' cultures and faiths.

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

The curriculum is broad and ambitious. Pupils study a wide range of subjects from Years 7 to 11. French has been introduced so that pupils can study two modern foreign languages. This is increasing the proportion of pupils studying the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. In Years 10 and 11, and in the sixth form, pupils can choose from an increasing range of subjects.

Subject leaders have identified the knowledge that pupils need to learn to achieve ambitious goals. They have thought carefully about the order in which this knowledge should be learned. This is constantly reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils.

Teachers check what pupils have learned before they introduce new knowledge and skills. For example, in art a new aspect of drawing is only introduced after the previously taught aspect is revisited.

Pupils respond extremely well to the challenge of becoming independent learners. They are taught from Year 7 to identify the gaps in their own learning and how to close these. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to carefully explain new ideas. Teachers emphasise subject-specific vocabulary. They ensure that pupils become confident in using it. For example, in Spanish pupils chant new vocabulary together and then use it individually.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Teachers use the detailed information in pupils' support plans to adapt their teaching. This ensures that these pupils achieve the same end points as their peers. Leaders have made support for reading a high priority. Weaker readers receive one-to-one support from a reading mentor until they become fluent readers. There is also an ambitious catch-up programme for mathematics led by subject mentors.

Low-level disruption in class is very rare. Pupils come to lessons ready and eager to learn. Pupils listen to the views of others with respect. For example, in science pupils shared and refined their thinking about ecosystems by listening to each other. Around the school, pupils are calm and considerate.

Leaders' work to include information about relevant careers in each curriculum subject is of particular note. This helps pupils to understand the linkage between what they learn in subjects and the entry requirements for a wide range of career options. Pupils in Year 10 and the sixth form have individual meetings with an impartial careers adviser to create a career plan. These plans help pupils to prepare for their next steps. Sixth-form pupils find out about apprenticeships and visit universities. Pupils with SEND receive additional careers support.

Leaders provide a wide range of after-school clubs. Pupils talk enthusiastically about these. A group of pupils described how learning self-defence in an after-school club had helped them feel more confident. Others explained how abseiling as part of the Year 8 activity trip had helped them to 'face [their] fears'.

Pupils learn about fundamental British values. For example, pupils in Year 10 visit the Houses of Parliament to learn about democracy. Leaders provide an extensive 'keeping well' programme which is well-planned. This includes learning about healthy relationships and consent. Pupils value the opportunity to talk openly about the issues raised. After lessons they can get further advice. Parents receive regular updates on what is being taught so they can discuss the issues with their children.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders engage with staff. They have recently revised the assessment policy in order to reduce staff workload. Governors carry out their statutory duties. They set clear priorities for the school and challenge leaders where appropriate.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils are able to report concerns online or directly to staff. Staff understand and use the reporting system consistently. Safeguarding leaders keep records of all concerns reported and follow these up rigorously. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular training on safeguarding, including about local issues. This means that staff know what signs to look for when a pupil might be at risk. Leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure pupils receive extra help.

Leaders have effective procedures in place to deal with situations involving child-on-child abuse. Leaders and staff know what procedures to follow if they have any concerns about adults working in the school.

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 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in October 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.

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	100455
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	10240559
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	768
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Maria Cunningham and Angelo Weekes (Co-chairs)
Headteacher	Tim Fox
Website	www.highburyfields.islington.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 to 7 October 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has an annex at Aberdeen Park, where sixth-form pupils attend most of their lessons.
- 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.
- The school currently uses one registered alternative provider, New River College Medical.

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 the school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other school leaders, teaching staff and non-teaching staff. Inspectors held a discussion with four members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: art and design, languages and science. 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 visited lessons and discussed the curriculum with subject leaders in a range of subjects, including computing; citizenship; personal, social, health and economic education; and religious studies.
- Inspectors held meetings with school leaders about the curriculum, careers education and SEND.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders, pupils and staff about the arrangements for safeguarding and reviewed safeguarding records and documentation. Inspectors also checked the single central record.
- Inspectors observed behaviour in lessons and around the school. Inspectors held formal and informal discussions with groups of pupils from different year groups.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey of parents' views, and to Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Gary Phillips, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jonathan Newby

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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