

# Inspection of a good school: Highfield Academy

Fordfield Road, Ford Estate, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR4 0DA

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Inspection dates:

11 and 12 October 2022

## Outcome

Highfield Academy continues to be a good school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders are ambitious for pupils. Teachers push pupils to maximise their potential. Pupils step up to the challenge. For example, leaders encourage pupils to take on extra responsibilities in school. Pupils do this willingly. Student council members are proud to represent their class at council meetings. Pupils take turns to help kitchen staff to clear things away at the end of lunchtime. 'Reading rangers' promote the importance of reading to their peers and look after the school library. They wear their reading ranger sashes with pride.

Pupils trust staff and feel safe. Pupils give visitors a warm welcome. They walk around school sensibly and pay attention in lessons. Incidents of poor behaviour and bullying are rare. Leaders deal with any incidents intelligently when they do occur. Leaders talk to pupils so that they understand why their behaviour is not acceptable at that time.

Leaders place a high priority on pupils' wider development. Pupils benefit from a range of clubs, such as the gardening club and science club. The 'Useful and Kind' group members bake cakes to raise funds for charity. They have donated clothes to the Ukrainian refugee appeal. This work helps pupils to become active citizens in their community and beyond.

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

Leaders have an accurate view of the school. They know pupils well, keep a close eye on pupils' progress and spot emerging issues in a timely manner. This has helped them to prioritise the right actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, leaders swiftly identified that pupils needed more support with reading. They adapted the curriculum so that reading was prioritised across the school. They did so without narrowing the curriculum for pupils. Pupils learning to read were given additional daily practice. A new phonics programme was put in place and staff were given effective training to teach reading. As a result, pupils have made accelerated progress and now read confidently. Regular and effective support remains in place for pupils who need something extra to help them improve their reading.

Leaders have increased the level of ambition in the curriculum. In most subjects, curriculum planning is detailed. This, in part, helps teachers to plan lessons that deepen pupils' knowledge over time. As a result, pupils talk articulately about their previous learning. For example, pupils use mathematical language to explain their reasoning when solving mathematics problems. In a minority of subjects, curriculum plans are less precise. Some plans do not clearly state when subject-specific knowledge, such as how historians use sources, should be taught by teachers. Leaders have clear plans in place to work with the trust to address this.

Leaders have trained staff effectively on how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This means that pupils with SEND access the full curriculum. Teachers make careful adaptations to lesson resources that they use to teach older pupils who continue to develop their reading skills. For example, teachers make sure that resources match the letter sounds that pupils already know. This means that pupils are well supported and make progress through the curriculum.

Children in the early years get off to a strong start. New leadership has strengthened the expanding early years provision. Adults in the Nursery and Reception are attentive to children's individual needs. They have identified that some children need more practice with their fine motor skills. They provide plenty of opportunities for children to strengthen their grip and increase accuracy when using their hands and fingers. Children are prepared well for when they begin learning to write. Children hit the ground running when they move to Year 1.

Pupils behave well. They are polite, well-mannered and pay attention in lessons. Pupils who find it hard to manage their emotions in school benefit from high-quality pastoral care from the school's 'hive' provision. For example, pupils can access mentoring and counselling from well-trained adults. This helps them to avoid making the wrong choices.

Leaders do lots to encourage regular pupil attendance. This includes home visits and working with families to address any barriers that stop pupils attending school. However, some pupils are still off school too often. They have gaps in their knowledge and understanding as a result.

Leaders undertake excellent work to support the social and moral development of pupils. These efforts have been recognised by others. The school achieved the Unicef 'Rights Respecting School' Silver Award. Pupils have opportunities to discuss and debate issues such as racism. This broadens their horizons.

The school has a family feel. Leaders engage effectively with staff. Subject coordinators feel well supported in their roles. Early careers teachers benefit from dedicated mentors.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are tenacious in their approach to safeguarding. Adults in school know the signs that may indicate a pupil could be at risk of harm. Any safeguarding concerns are passed

on in a timely manner. Staff have strengthened links with families in the community. This helps them to understand better any pupils who need extra help. Leaders engage with external safeguarding agencies in a timely fashion. Record-keeping is clear and detailed.

Pupils understand how to keep safe. For example, they know not to provide their personal details to strangers when they are online.

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

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

- Curriculum planning in a minority of the foundation subjects, such as history, is not precise enough. For example, although leaders have identified the topics for pupils to study, curriculum plans do not make clear when disciplinary knowledge should be taught in the curriculum. This means that sometimes teachers are unclear on the exact content that they should teach to pupils at a given point. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans give teachers sufficient information so that they have clarity about what important knowledge they need to teach to pupils in all subjects.
- Some pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should. This means that they miss out on learning important knowledge in the curriculum. Leaders should continue to work with families to ensure that pupils' attendance improves.

## **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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Highfield Community Primary School, to be good in April 2013.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	144219
<b>Local authority</b>	Sunderland
<b>Inspection number</b>	10241347
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	393
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Darren Andrews
<b>Headteacher</b>	Melanie Davies
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.highfieldprimary.org.uk">www.highfieldprimary.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- Highfield Academy converted to become an academy school in June 2018. When its predecessor school, Highfield Community Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is one of three schools that are part of the Iris Learning Trust.
- The school has operated a nursery provision for two-year-olds since 2021.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior and middle leaders. They also met with the chief executive officer of the trust.
- The inspector held a meeting with two members of the board of trustees, including the chair. They also met with the chair and vice-chair of the local academy council.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject coordinators, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work. They also listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- The inspector met with the subject coordinators for religious education and science. They reviewed curriculum plans and samples of pupils' work in these subjects.
- The inspector met with staff who lead on safeguarding, including the headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding leader. They discussed the arrangements for safeguarding, reviewed the school's safeguarding records and checked the single central record. Throughout the inspection, the inspector spoke to teachers, non-teachers and pupils about their safeguarding knowledge.
- The inspector discussed pupils' wider personal development with the headteacher and reviewed personal, social and health education (PSHE) planning, as well as speaking to pupils about their PSHE knowledge.
- The inspector met formally and informally with staff and pupils, including some early careers teachers along with their mentors. The inspector also observed lunchtime and pupils leaving at the end of the school day.
- The inspector considered a range of school documentation. This included leaders' self-evaluation of the school, curriculum development plans and the school's attendance analysis.
- The views of parents received through the Ofsted Parent View survey were also considered.

## **Inspection team**

Graham Findlay, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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