

Inspection of an outstanding school: Highfields Primary School

Colchester Road, Lawford, Manningtree, Essex CO11 2BN

Inspection dates:

15 and 16 November 2022

Outcome

Highfields Primary School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils achieve exceptionally well in all curriculum subjects because leaders have high aspirations for all aspects of school life. One pupil said, 'Teachers strive to push you to your potential, and they make it seem fun.' Pupils say they are taught 'kind play' and have lots of friends. If there is any unkindness, adults rapidly sort this out.

Pupils have a love of learning. Classrooms are quiet, purposeful places because learning is interesting. Pupils say that if they do not understand something, teachers take time to explain and help them.

There are highly effective systems for supporting pupils' learning behaviour. Year 6 pupils said that they do not need the traffic light system anymore because, 'When we are working, everyone's heads are down and getting on with the task.' Pupils also behave exceptionally well as they move around the school, and they play well together at breaktimes.

Pupils feel safe at school. They are confident to talk to adults if they have problems. They like the extra support that is available to them if they want to talk about their emotions or worries.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Pupils enjoy an extensive range of after-school clubs and activities. There is excellent provision for pupils' personal development and their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, so they are well prepared for the next stage in their education and for life in modern Britain.

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

Senior and middle leaders began their overhaul of the curriculum a year before the COVID-19 pandemic began. By the time all pupils returned to school, most subjects were exceptionally well planned and structured. Leaders acknowledge that one or two subjects

need minor adaptations to enable pupils to learn securely and remember more. Leaders have planned to complete this work by the end of this term.

Subject leaders are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subjects. They provide effective training for staff and give helpful support for planning lessons. Senior leaders minimise workload issues. Leaders provide time for subject managers to research good practice in their subjects and for staff to discuss and refine curriculum plans from Reception to Year 6.

Children make an exceptionally strong start in learning to read. They rapidly grasp phonics. Some Reception children are reading simple books eight weeks after starting school. Leaders promote the importance of reading exceptionally well with parents. Pupils' progress in learning to read was not adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of the excellent support parents received.

Reading books are well matched to the stage of phonics pupils are working on. Pupils' love of reading starts in Reception and continues throughout the school. They read a wide range of authors because teachers encourage them to read diverse types of books. Pupils talk with great enthusiasm about their favourite authors and what it is they like about them.

There are excellent and well-embedded behaviour and learning routines that start in Reception. Pupils say that it does not matter which class you are in, teachers are fair and have the same high expectations.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive highly effective support for their learning and development. Leaders collaborate closely with parents, and with external agencies, to ensure pupils receive the additional help they need. All pupils with SEND work diligently in the classroom with the support of well-trained support staff. Teachers adapt the curriculum well in all subjects.

There is excellent provision for children in all the areas of learning in the early years. Children settle rapidly into school. They are ready to learn because of the highly effective transition arrangements. Children listen attentively and make rapid progress in learning due to leaders' and teachers' high expectations.

There is an exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities for pupils, including interesting visitors and visits out of school. For example, during the inspection, key stage 1 pupils had a history day learning about the Great Fire of London.

Governors work closely with senior and middle leaders. Governors meet regularly with subject leaders to check how well pupils are learning. Governors know the school well and offer stringent challenge as well as support to leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safety in the school. Leaders and staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding. They are vigilant in ensuring all pupils are safe. There are robust and effective systems in place for recording concerns. Leaders do not let up in pursuing the best help and support for the most vulnerable children and families. They work effectively with external agencies.

Safeguarding processes and procedures are regularly checked by governors and annually, via an audit, by the local authority.

Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online and in the local community. The effective computing and relationships and sex education curriculums contribute well to pupils' understanding.

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 July 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	114769
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10227108
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	319
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mr Malcolm Gentry
Headteacher	Mrs Hilary Cook
Website	www.highfields-essex.co.uk/
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 July 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is slightly larger than the average primary school.
- Most staff were at the school at the time of the last inspection.

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, the reading and curriculum manager, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders for history, science and mathematics, the early years leader, teachers, support staff and groups of pupils.
- The inspector met with the chair of the governing body and a group of governors.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and design technology. These included discussions with subject leaders, visits to lessons, meetings with staff and pupils and scrutinising pupils' books.

- The inspector focused on other aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding, pupils' wider development, staff's workload, and off-rolling.
- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and Ofsted's staff survey. They considered responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text messages, and spoke to a group of parents.

Inspection team

Julie Winyard, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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