

Inspection of Highsted Grammar School

Highsted Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 4PT

Inspection dates: 17 to 18 January 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and students flourish and succeed at Highsted Grammar. They are very carefully prepared for their future roles and responsibilities. Leaders set high expectations of what they can achieve. Pupils and students respond well to these high expectations. An ambitious 'cognitive and compassion' curriculum offers a fitting balance of academic rigour and pastoral support.

Pupils are courteous, polite and welcoming. They are happy, safe and well cared for. Rare instances of bullying are resolved very quickly and effectively. Careers guidance helps pupils to make appropriate choices about next steps. Many pupils stay on into the sixth form. Similarly high numbers of students proceed to quality universities of their own choice.

There is an extensive programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. This includes subject clubs, sports fixtures, music competitions and careers conventions. Pupils relish trips to museums, theatres and art galleries, as well as exchange visits to Bavaria and expeditions abroad.

The school is focused on promoting positive mental health through activities such as the Year 7 Friendship Day, residential trips, house drama, the school choir and peer mentoring. Mental health well-being is also a key part of the 'Education for Life' programme, showcasing female role models and featuring inspirational and influential speakers.

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

The curriculum is well planned and thoughtfully constructed. It is ambitious, with a strong academic basis reflecting the selective intake. The teaching of the curriculum is not as strong in some subjects as others. This results in some inconsistencies across subjects, which the school is addressing with determination.

The school offers a broad range of subjects with a strong emphasis on languages and a high uptake of triple science. Curriculum content builds well upon the key stage 2 curriculum supported by extensive outreach work with primary schools. Sixth-form students enjoy a wide range of subjects and typically take four A levels and an extended project qualification.

Higher prior attaining pupils are well known and actively encouraged to deepen their knowledge. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are accurately identified and sensitively supported through the curriculum. Staff turnover has had an impact on the provision for pupils with SEND, which the school is addressing through additional senior leader intervention.

Teachers' subject knowledge is exceptionally strong. In the best lessons, planning ensures that content is revisited, with an emphasis on retaining knowledge supported by retrieval activities. Subject specific vocabulary is highlighted and extended. Reading is actively promoted, and pupils are encouraged to read more widely. Assessment is regular, and feedback is detailed. This helps pupils to appreciate their next steps.

Behaviour is well managed, and the recently revised behaviour policy is welcomed by pupils and staff. Incidents of poor behaviour are low, and attendance is high. Pupils arrive punctually to their lessons, so learning time is maximised. In a small number of lessons, pupils are ambivalent about their learning.

A small number of pupils say there is a lack of focus on their mental health and well-being. The school has numerous support mechanisms in place, including a well-considered personal, social and health education programme, a responsive assembly agenda and a successful careers programme. These prepare pupils and students well for the next stage in their educational journeys.

Staff are well supported through collaborative departmental training. There is a strong focus on developing knowledge about their subjects and how to teach them. A small but significant number of staff do not feel fully supported regarding workload. Senior leaders are working collaboratively to identify how to support staff in a 'work efficient way'.

Leaders work hard to engage and inform parents and carers through regular surveys, school events, parents' evenings and weekly bulletins. Feedback from parents is not all positive. They do not all feel sufficiently engaged with the school and the work that the school is doing for their children. As a result, they feel negative about the school and uninformed about its intentions.

Leaders at all levels talk with enthusiasm and commitment about the school. They have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality education for all. Leaders in the sixth form have the same high aspirations, resulting in successful examination outcomes and university entrance.

Governors have a good understanding of the school and can identify strengths and areas for improvement. Their regular visits to the school allow them to understand what is going on. Governors are enthusiastic about the school and work with determination to ensure the school's success.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safer recruitment practices are rigorously pursued. The single central record is well kept and suitably detailed, with all required checks carried out. The designated safeguarding lead has a robust understanding of the context of the school. All staff

receive timely training and frequent updates. Staff know how to report safeguarding issues. Detailed records illustrate the actions taken to ensure pupils' safety.

Leaders work with commitment, dedication and determination to ensure that all pupils are safe. The school maintains a 'culture of vigilance' where safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The school's focus on welfare and well-being is actively supported by the student council. Regardless, a number of pupils are anxious about their mental health and well-being.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects, the curriculum is not yet implemented securely and consistently. This means that the impact of the curriculum in these subjects is not as assured as it is in other subjects. Leaders should continue to share the best practice that already exists. They should ensure that curriculum implementation is securely and consistently embedded across the school.
- Not all parents feel sufficiently engaged with the school and the work that the school is doing for their children. As a result, they feel negative about the school and uninformed about its intentions. Leaders should continue to work with parents so that they are sufficiently engaged with the school and better understand the work that the school is doing.

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	136305
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10242422
Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	895
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Peter Statham
Headteacher	Anne Kelly
Website	www.highsted.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Highsted Grammar School is a smaller than average sized 11 to 18 selective girls school. It is the only school in the Highsted Academy Trust.
- This is the first inspection since the school opened as an academy in February 2012. When the predecessor school with the same name was inspected in February 2009, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school makes use of two registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information about approved technical educational 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 standard inspection the school had 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 carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, history, art and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke with subject leaders about the curriculum, visited a selection of lessons, talked to subject teachers, spoke with pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, staff, students and pupils. They examined the single central record, read safeguarding documentation and reviewed the school's practices and procedures. They spoke with parents and a representative of the local authority safeguarding team.
- Inspectors considered the policies provided by the school. They studied curriculum documentation, suspension statistics, behaviour logs, attendance records and destination information. The lead inspector met with trustees.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and further written comments provided by them. They reviewed the responses to the online surveys completed by staff and by pupils. They also received a small number of communications from parents by letter and by email.

Inspection team

Paul Metcalf, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Nicky Archer	Ofsted Inspector
Jason Philipsz	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Baker	Ofsted Inspector

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