

Inspection of Highfields Spencer Academy

Tutbury Avenue, Littleover, Derby, Derbyshire DE23 3UX

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Highfields Spencer Academy prides itself on being a diverse and inclusive school. Pupils say they enjoy school and are happy. They feel safe. Pupils like spending time with their friends. They respect each other's differences. Some pupils say the school feels like a family. One pupil said, 'this school is about being kind to children'.

Leaders have high expectations of all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, these expectations are not yet realised. This is because pupils do not receive a well-delivered curriculum. Teaching is often inconsistent.

The school environment is calm. Most pupils behave well. They are ready to learn and enjoy learning. There is some low-level disruption in some classes, but it does not affect the learning of others. Bullying is rare. If it does happen, leaders do not tolerate it.

Pupils know the school's 'Rainbow' values of 'respect, achieve, inspire, nurture, belong, open and well-being'. Most pupils show respect to adults and each other.

Parents and carers appreciate the warm welcome they receive from leaders and staff. Some parents would like communication to improve, especially parents of children with SEND, who are not always aware of the support their children receive.

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

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils to achieve well, including pupils with SEND. There is a well-planned curriculum in place, which starts in the early years. Leaders have ensured that they have identified the important knowledge they want pupils to know. However, they have yet to make sure that teachers deliver the curriculum effectively and consistently.

The work teachers set does not always match what pupils are expected to learn from the topics they are studying. For some pupils, the work is not demanding enough. Sometimes, they stop engaging with the tasks teachers set them. Consequently, they stop learning as well as they could.

Teachers do not regularly check what pupils know. Most teachers use recap and recall at the start of lessons. However, this practice is not yet embedded or consistent across all subjects. Most pupils can discuss current learning, but they struggle to recall past learning. In some subjects, there are significant gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Children in the early years enjoy a language-rich environment. Most children are following routines and are ready to learn. There are many opportunities for children to learn through play. They enjoy listening and taking part in story time.

The phonics outcomes for Year 1 pupils in 2022 were below average due to the inconsistent teaching of the scheme. Leaders have now prioritised early reading, which starts in the early years. They use a systematic scheme to teach phonics. All staff have received training to deliver this scheme. Teachers identify pupils who are falling behind. These pupils receive daily support to catch up quickly. Pupils read the books that match the phonics they know. Early readers are beginning to read with more confidence. Pupils say they enjoy reading and have a wide range of books to choose from.

The provision for pupils with SEND is in the early stages of development. Staff do not yet receive enough information about these pupils to know how best to support them in their learning.

Pupils' personal development is a priority for leaders. There is a 'nurture breakfast club' for pupils who struggle to start learning at the beginning of the day. Pupils enjoy attending lunch and after-school clubs. They develop their interest in sport, art, music, dance, circus skills and more through attending these clubs. Pupils enjoy taking on the responsibility to develop their characters, including by acting as librarians, prefects and sports ambassadors. Pupils have some understanding about different types of relationships. They understand the importance of being kind to each other. Pupils know the importance of being physically healthy. They know how to look after their own mental health and well-being.

There are activities that support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, leaders do not ensure that these activities are consistently delivered. Pupils do not have a good enough understanding of other faiths and religions. They do understand the importance of the different British values. They have the opportunity to be part of the school and eco-councils.

Staff enjoy working at this school. They feel that their well-being and workload are supported by leaders.

The school has grown significantly during the past year. Leaders have not had the capacity to check the quality of education regularly. Recent changes in leadership have resulted in an increased capacity to make improvements. The trust and governors have supported leaders to bring about these improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. All staff know that they have a responsibility to keep all pupils safe. Staff receive regular updates and training.

They know how to spot pupils who may be at risk of harm. All staff know how to report concerns. Leaders act quickly and respond effectively to concerns. They work well with external agencies. They ensure that pupils and their families get the right support.

Staff teach pupils about safeguarding risks, including how to stay safe online. There is a pastoral support team, which provides support for pupils if they need it.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teaching in some subjects does not support pupils to learn the intended curriculum effectively. This is limiting the breadth and depth of knowledge pupils acquire by the end of each year. Leaders should ensure that there is consistency in the way in which staff implement the curriculum plans from Year 1 upwards so that pupils gain the knowledge they need to build their understanding securely over time.
- Staff do not assess what pupils know well enough so that they know where further support may be needed. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders should ensure that staff know when and how to assess what pupils know and understand so that they can identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge.
- Pupils do not have a good enough knowledge and understanding of different faiths and beliefs. Therefore, pupils are not being well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders should ensure that pupils receive sufficient opportunities to learn about different faiths and beliefs so that they develop a secure understanding of cultural and religious difference in British and global society.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is at an early stage of implementation. The information that teachers receive about these pupils to help support them in their learning lacks the necessary precision. Consequently, pupils with SEND do not consistently receive the support they need to be able to achieve as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that teachers have the necessary knowledge of the additional needs of pupils with SEND so that they can make informed decisions about the most effective support to give them.

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	147869
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10254756
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	185
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Donna Kinderman
Principal	Anna Jones
Website	highfieldsspencer.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Highfields Spencer Academy is part of Spencer Academies Trust.
- The school opened in September 2020. Currently, there are only pupils in the early years and Years 1 to 3.
- There are two breakfast and after-school clubs, one externally managed and one managed by the school.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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.

- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, the vice principal, representatives of the trust, trustees, and members of the local governing body.
- Inspectors undertook deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, computing and geography. Inspectors met with subject leaders, teachers and groups of pupils. They visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- The lead inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding procedures, including the single central record and child protection and safeguarding policies. She met with the designated leader for safeguarding.
- The lead inspector met with leaders responsible for behaviour, personal development, children looked after, pupil premium, attendance, the early years, and the provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors considered responses recorded on Ofsted's online survey for parents, Parent View, including free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff gathered through meetings with groups of staff and responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for school staff.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons and observed behaviour in lessons and during break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including that related to the school's self-evaluation, school improvement, attendance and behaviour, the curriculum, and governance.

Inspection team

Anita Denman, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Helen Atkins

Ofsted Inspector

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