

Inspection of an outstanding school: Guildford County School

Farnham Road, Guildford, Surrey GU2 4LU

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 February 2023

Outcome

Guildford County School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are ambitious to learn, and they achieve exceptionally well. The school has a creative and purposeful environment. Here, pupils feel safe. Pupils experience a rich and varied learning experience, both in and out of lessons. This is a community where, as staff and pupils proudly state, 'better never stops'.

Staff have the very highest of expectations, and pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Leaders deal with incidents of bullying with sensitivity. They are determined to work with pupils and their parents to reach satisfactory and lasting outcomes for all involved.

Pupils are attentive, and actively involved in making choices about their learning. Older pupils become increasingly independent in their thinking and study habits. Sixth-form students feel very well prepared for the next stage of their education and employment. They think creatively and flexibly, and eagerly debate their learning.

Parents are hugely appreciative of what the leaders and all the staff do to enable their children to flourish. One parent spoke for many, when they said: 'This is such a great community school. It has high expectations of the students in all areas of school life, providing a really stretching, yet balanced, life education.'

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

Leaders and staff have created a rich curriculum designed to ensure that all pupils become resilient and thoughtful learners. Each subject has clear and ambitious goals for pupils. These include gaining a deep and lasting understanding of the knowledge and skills that they have learned. Leaders have designed a curriculum that is challenging for all. Teachers plan sequences of lessons that ensure that pupils achieve the aims of this curriculum. The work completed in lessons is well matched to pupils' ability and is of a high standard.

Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Pupils appreciate the very clear explanations that they are given and the way in which topics link well together. Teachers regularly learn from each other, in a relentless drive to be the best they can be. They are persistent in checking how well pupils have understood new information. This means pupils can fluently recall past and recent learning. Pupils then confidently apply this knowledge to help them learn new material. Teachers carefully use assessments to ensure that all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make excellent progress. Leaders have detailed knowledge of the needs of pupils with SEND. This is communicated to teachers so that they can quickly provide any additional support that is required.

Pupils have highly positive attitudes to their learning, and work hard. They are eager to take part in lessons and are confident to ask questions about what they are learning. No learning time is lost. This is also seen in the sixth form, which is calm and inclusive. There are extremely positive relationships throughout the school. Many parents reflect on how well the school helps their child to be happy and successful.

The developing of reading has a strong focus across the school. Younger pupils benefit from purposeful sessions in the library and designated reading sessions. Suitably trained staff provide appropriate interventions to help pupils who may find reading more difficult to become confident readers.

Pupils' wider development has a high priority. Pupils enjoy the many meaningful leadership opportunities. There is a vibrant school council and a student learning team. Older students lead school clubs, house events, drama productions and sports competitions. The school has a well-deserved reputation for wonderful and inclusive music-making. Pupils appreciate the wide range of opportunities that are available.

The development of pupils' character and values are priorities for school leaders. Staff use high-quality resources to teach pupils about citizenship, careers, moral values and different cultures. Pupils consider a broad range of relevant ethical and topical issues from different viewpoints. This empowers them with the knowledge and confidence to think critically for themselves. Impartial careers advice and guidance mean pupils are well informed about the next stage of their education.

Those responsible for governance know the school extremely well. They provide robust challenge to leaders. Together with school and trust leaders, governors ensure that the quality of education remains extremely effective for all pupils.

Staff describe, in glowing terms, the inclusive and purposeful culture that exists in the school. Leaders consider staff's workload when they make strategic plans. Staff feel listened to and well supported by leaders. All staff set themselves high standards, and they benefit from a rich range of professional development opportunities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff reliably report concerns that they have about the safety of pupils. They receive regular training and safeguarding updates. Leaders take timely and effective safeguarding actions. They are determined to get pupils the help they need to stay safe, and there are many layers of support available in school and externally. Leaders also ensure that they follow statutory recruitment practices to ensure that adults are suitable to work with pupils. Regular reviews help to ensure that safeguarding arrangements remain strong.

Pupils are taught about how to stay safe. This includes learning about any potential risks in their local community.

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 January 2017.

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	139193
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10240584
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,213
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	298
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andrew Isherwood
Headteacher	Steve Smith
Website	www.guildfordcounty.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 January 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Learning Partners Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust made up of 12 state schools.
- The school currently uses six registered alternative providers and one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers, the assistant headteachers, lead practitioners and other leaders.
- Inspectors met with members of the board of trustees and the local governing body, as well as the chief executive officer of the Learning Partners Academy Trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, languages and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with leaders of personal, social and health education to discuss the curriculum and provision for pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. Inspectors met with groups of pupils and spoke to pupils during lessons and at other times of the day. Inspectors also took into account pupils' responses to the Ofsted pupil survey.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of recruitment checks, talked to leaders responsible for safeguarding and looked at the school's safeguarding records and documents. Inspectors also talked to staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' behaviour, minutes of governors' meetings and the school's development plan.
- Inspectors met with members of staff to discuss the school's work and considered their responses to the confidential Ofsted survey for staff. They also looked at parents' responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Nick Simmonds, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Lucy Hillyard	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Fearon	Ofsted Inspector

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