

Inspection of Hopwood Hall School

15 Highfield Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 3DU

Inspection dates:

7 to 9 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Hopwood Hall school is a calm and welcoming place. Pupils settle into school well and quickly form positive relationships with pupils and staff. As a result, pupils who have struggled to attend school in the past attend well and thrive here. Leaders have high expectations that all pupils will attend regularly and re-engage with learning, and they do.

Pupils show respect and care for each other. Disruptions to learning and disagreements between pupils are rare. Any issues that do occur are resolved quickly by skilful and patient staff who know the pupils and their needs very well. Staff are alert to bullying and it is not tolerated.

Parents and carers express their delight with the way staff care for their children. They value the support provided for pupils to achieve success, develop confidence and gain life skills. The curriculum is tailored to pupils' interests, for example discovering the joy of music and finding the confidence to perform to an audience.

Leaders prioritise pupils' mental health and well-being so that they can learn to learn again. Academically, pupils enjoy a range of subjects that are taught by subject specialists. However, leaders do not check that this is being done effectively often enough or that teachers' assessments of pupils' starting points and academic targets are accurate. This means that teachers do not always adapt the curriculum to address pupils' starting points accurately.

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

Leaders' commitment to improving the quality of education is evident. Improvements made since the last inspection are starting to have an impact on pupils' learning. Leaders have recruited more teachers, which means that leaders now have more time for their leadership roles. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and have started to review and revise curriculum plans so that pupils' learning is more carefully sequenced. Some teachers have been trained to teach phonics, so they can support pupils at the early stages of reading.

Teachers work hard to establish positive relationships with pupils. As pupils gain confidence and trust, they re-engage with learning and enjoy their lessons. Pupils behave well in class. They articulate their learning and ask questions when they don't understand. Teachers are sensitive to pupils' needs at all times.

When teachers make checks on pupils' learning, they sometimes misjudge pupils' starting points, which results in the setting of inappropriate academic targets. In addition, leaders do not check what teachers are teaching and how they are delivering the curriculum. As a result, they have a generous and inaccurate view of the quality of education on offer. Leaders do not have sufficient evidence of what is working well and what could be improved.

Reading has a high priority across the school. In lessons such as English, history and citizenship, pupils read varied and challenging texts. Many pupils have missed large parts of their earlier education, including phonics teaching. Pupils are now learning phonics in an age-appropriate way to fill gaps in their learning. However, teachers do not assess pupils' knowledge of phonics before they start. Hence, it is difficult to determine accurate starting points and ensure that teaching addresses gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge.

Leaders prioritise pupils' personal and social development. Pupils enjoy visits to places of cultural interest, such as historic sites and art galleries. Visiting the local coffee shop is an opportunity for pupils to get used to the wider world. Pupils learn about tolerance, respect, democracy and the law through citizenship lessons and speak confidently about them. They learn about different relationships and how to behave appropriately as relationships develop. Pupils enjoy contributing to lively topical debates. They have a strong sense of fairness and are keen campaigners. Pupils raise money for charity through special events. These activities help pupils to understand how they can make a positive contribution to society.

Careers advice and guidance are in the early stages of development. Pupils meet with independent careers advisers to discuss their career choices. Many pupils have aspirations to join professions such as medicine and music. Leaders arrange bespoke work experience opportunities to help pupils get used to the world of work and explore their chosen careers.

Parents value leaders' support as they prepare their children to move on from school. Leaders have recently applied to extend the age range of pupils at the school to 18 years old. This is because pupils on roll who have missed a lot of their education often need more time to complete GCSEs and develop confidence before moving on to college or sixth form.

Members of the proprietor body understand their roles well. They have expertise in buildings, finance, safeguarding and health and safety. Together with the headteacher, they have ensured that the school meets all of the independent school standards, including the school's responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to put in place an accessibility plan. Rigorous systems are in place to track and monitor all of the necessary policies and compliance documents. The safeguarding policy takes account of the most recent government guidance and is available to parents on request. Trustees review policies regularly. However, trustees accept leaders' assertions about the quality of education too readily. Leaders' plans for improvement are not probed in enough detail. As a result, leaders do not always focus on the most important improvement priorities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff are well trained and staff know the pupils really well. As a result, they know how to identify risks and spot signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Daily debriefing sessions allow teachers to share any concerns.

Leaders discuss pupils' needs with parents and local authorities so that support for pupils' mental health and well-being is provided promptly.

When recruiting staff, leaders carry out the necessary pre-employment checks and keep accurate records. Safer recruitment training and other safeguarding training are updated regularly. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, especially online. Their use of the internet is closely monitored to prevent access to any inappropriate material.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Teachers' assessments of pupils' prior learning are not always accurate and leaders do not check them. As a result, the curriculum is not as finely tuned to pupils' needs as it needs to be and academic targets are not always appropriate. Leaders should ensure that teachers' assessments are checked and that assessment information informs the next steps in pupils' learning more precisely.
- Leaders have an inaccurate view of the quality of education because they have not maintained sufficient oversight of the implementation of the curriculum. Leaders have not identified teachers' training needs accurately enough and their plans for teachers' professional development are not linked closely enough to school development priorities. Leaders should ensure that their monitoring activities provide them with a more accurate view of the quality of education that accurately identifies school development priorities and teachers' training needs.
- The proprietor body does not currently challenge leaders' actions and decisions sufficiently in relation to the quality of education. They accept leaders' generous view of the quality of education too readily without asking for evidence to support these judgements. The proprietor body should ensure that leaders' assertions are supported by evidence so that school development activities are more sharply focused on identified needs.
- The recently introduced phonics programme is being implemented without an accurate view of pupils' starting points. Teachers assume that because pupils are secondary age, they do not need to start at the beginning of the phonics scheme. This means that gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge are not clearly identified. Leaders should ensure that teachers assess pupils' phonics knowledge accurately so that gaps are identified and addressed promptly.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	146780
DfE registration number	330/6045
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10254694
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Hadley Educational Ltd
Chair	Richard Sprange
Headteacher	Jill Cornfield
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,000
Telephone number	0121 2852851
Website	Not applicable
Email address	jill.cornfield@hopwoodhallschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 December 2021

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, including anxiety, specific learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Since the last inspection, the number of pupils on roll has increased to 16.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school's last full inspection was in December 2021. The school was judged to require improvement.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During the inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives into the following subjects: English, mathematics, science and history. The deep dive methodology was adapted appropriately to minimise impact on the pupils. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject teachers, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders about safeguarding, special educational needs and/or disabilities, behaviour and attendance, personal development, careers education, information, advice and guidance and their actions since the previous inspection to address the identified areas for improvement.
- The lead inspector checked policies and other documents and took a tour of the building to check that the independent school standards were met.
- The lead inspector spoke to the chair of the proprietor body on the telephone.
- The lead inspector reviewed responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, as well as responses to the staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils at breaktime about their learning, how they learn to keep themselves safe and pupils' behaviour.

Information about the material change inspection

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The school has proposed a change to the age range of pupils.
- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- The new provision would only be for pupils who were already registered at the school prior to entering this new provision. This provision would support pupils aged 17 and above for whom there is no suitable alternative in their local area. The provision would enable pupils who need additional time to complete their studies to be able to gain the qualifications they need to make a successful next step. Leaders agreed that if any pupils are capable of studying three A levels, they should seek to do this elsewhere. The facilities, resources and teacher expertise are in place for the new provision to be successful.

Inspection team

Jane Spilsbury, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Edgerton	Ofsted Inspector

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