

Inspection of The Holt School

Holt Lane, Wokingham, Berkshire RG41 1EE

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Ofsted has not previously inspected The Holt School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged The Holt School to be outstanding, before it opened as an academy.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's motto of 'Be kind, aim high, work hard' embodies pupils' exceedingly high aspirations and outcomes. Leaders set very high aspirations for all pupils, then do all they can to help pupils achieve and exceed them. Parents, carers and pupils know that staff care profoundly about pupils' success. One parent told inspectors, 'Our daughter has really flourished since joining the school.'

A plethora of deliberately planned opportunities extend and enhance the curriculum. Together, they forge unforgettable memories. The House system is central to this. House competitions are deeply competitive, and highly valued by pupils. The annual performing arts productions characterise the dedication of pupils and staff. Extra-curricular sports activities engage and enthuse a significant proportion of pupils. Individual talent is recognised and celebrated. Clubs such as chess, coding and cooking are heavily oversubscribed and used by pupils from all backgrounds. Pupils relish many opportunities to raise money for local and global charities.

Bullying is not tolerated. Leaders resolve any very rare bullying incidents with a swift and appropriate response. Pupils learn how to cope with the pressures of growing up in a technology-rich environment. Older students readily take on the responsibilities of mentoring and leadership positions. This helps to maintain exceptionally high standards of behaviour in and around the school.

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

Leaders are unashamedly ambitious for all pupils. A carefully crafted curriculum ensures that pupils build new knowledge and skills at an impressive rate. Teachers deliver lessons exceptionally well. They use a range of highly effective strategies and high-quality resources to enhance effective learning of the curriculum.

Pupils regularly rehearse and embed new knowledge. Teachers' assessment of pupils' deepening understanding is accurate and timely. This helps teachers to identify gaps or misconceptions in learning swiftly. Teachers use knowledge of pupils' progress to plan subsequent lessons. Leaders have taken decisive action to ensure that the curriculum is inclusive. For example, in physical education, all pupils have broad and ambitious opportunities to maintain engagement with the subject and to participate in a range of carefully considered qualifications.

Leaders consider the needs of all pupils meticulously. As a result, pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve remarkable outcomes. Almost all pupils study the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. A small number of pupils study a bespoke curriculum appropriate to their needs. Expert staff support them. Leaders prioritise reading. Pupils often read extensively in class. Staff encourage them to read widely. Very few pupils struggle with reading. Those who do receive expert support. This helps them to catch up quickly. Aspirational texts inspire pupils in English. At A level, students study texts suitable for undergraduate study.

The sixth form is small but highly effective. Pupils in Year 11 receive tailored, unbiased guidance to help them select the most appropriate post-16 destinations. Many choose to stay at The Holt School to complete their studies. Leaders ensure that there is a balanced programme of vocational and academic subjects on offer. Staff know students extremely well and provide appropriate aspirational challenge and support. A learning mentor provides bespoke academic support where needed.

Pupils are highly respectful of each other. Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally positive, which leads to exceedingly strong attitudes to learning. Staff manage behaviour calmly and consistently. While attendance is strong, leaders maintain a rigorous and ambitious focus here. Expert staff provide excellent pastoral support. Many parents told inspectors that the support they receive from the school is highly valued.

Alongside their strong focus on academia, leaders prioritise the wider development of pupils to prepare them for their next steps. Pupils develop confidence and resilience through carefully planned character education. Leaders actively promote the celebration of success. Pupils relish the wide range of opportunities to learn life skills such as debating and effective communication. Careers information and guidance is strong throughout the school. Seminars in the sixth form prepare students for learning at university or the workplace. Students appreciate lessons in finance, the global career market, consumer rights and forming professional relationships in the workplace.

Governors are keenly aware of the school's strengths and the need to refine their practice further. The recent review of the school values reinvigorated their commitment to continuing excellence. Individual governors bring expertise to their respective roles. They are mindful of staff's workload and take appropriate action to ensure that they provide support for the mental health of staff. Governors provide focused challenge to leaders' unswerving ambition of continued improvement. Staff are loyal to the school. All staff seek to provide an exceptional quality of education and experience for pupils. The co-headteachers are ambitious and highly effective in fulfilling their roles.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are vigilant, and rightly view safeguarding as a high priority. Leaders are extremely well organised, and maintain a constant focus on the well-being and safety of pupils. Leaders ensure that all staff receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training of the highest quality. This equips all staff to identify pupils who may be at risk of harm. Leaders forge strong relationships with local and national agencies. This enables them to ensure that any pupils who may require specialist support access it quickly and appropriately.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe from risks such as online abuse, unhealthy relationships and sexual harassment. Older students participate in regular

workshops and discuss issues that are most relevant to them. Pupils know what to do if they are worried and know whom to go to for support and advice.

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	136880
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	10229054
Type of school	Secondary
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	1,426
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	254
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Fiona Jane Cross
Headteacher	Anne Kennedy (Co-Headteacher) Katie Pearce (Co-Headteacher)
Website	www.holtschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Holt School converted to become an academy school in February 2012. When its predecessor school, with the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- Since the previous inspection, two new co-headteachers have been appointed.
- The school is part of a single academy trust, with the same name as the school.
- The school currently uses one registered and two unregistered 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 and engagement about approved technical education 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 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 senior leaders of the school, members of staff and pupils. The lead inspector also met with trustees and the chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, design and technology, physical education and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also reviewed curriculum work and lessons in art, history and politics.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors also talked to a range of staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with staff, pupils and parents to gather their views. They considered 294 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including 177 free-text comments. Inspectors also took account of 121 responses to the staff survey. Inspectors spoke to a number of pupils while on inspection and took account of 475 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Linda Culling, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Julia Mortimore	Ofsted Inspector
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