

Inspection of The Highfield School

Highfield, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 3QA

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 May 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders at The Highfield School are caring and have high expectations. They want the very best for the pupils and students. Most pupils enjoy attending school.

Pupils can participate in a range of extra-curricular activities. They comment that after-school sport enables them to feel part of the community. Pupils feel safe. They say that they have a voice through the school council and parliament. An increasing number of pupils also participate in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.

Most pupils behave well. Typically, lessons are calm and enable pupils to learn well. Social times and the transition between lessons are also orderly. Pupils are generally respectful to one another. Sixth-form pupils are polite and engaging.

A small proportion of pupils report that inappropriate language and behaviour does occur. The school recognises this and is taking action to address it. The school is part of the 'great representations' programme. Sixth-form students speak highly of changes implemented in the school and describe an increasingly inclusive environment.

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

Pupils access a broad and balanced curriculum that enables most of them to meet leaders' ambitions. While outcomes at key stage 4 are above national average, some disadvantaged pupils do not make the progress leaders intend. Leaders consider the sequence of knowledge carefully to ensure pupils are confident in their understanding. In most subjects, teachers use assessment well to support pupils' learning. Pupils can describe how they use assessment results to improve their understanding. In a very small number of subjects, curriculum planning is not well developed, but this is being addressed by leaders. There is a planned programme in place to support those children identified as struggling with reading.

The curriculum for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is ambitious at all key stages. The needs of pupils are identified at an early stage. Pupils are well supported, and provision is appropriate. Pupils with SEND benefit from detailed adaptations to learning. Teachers benefit from having detailed information about the needs of individual pupils.

While most pupils behave well in lessons, a small proportion of pupils say that lessons can be disrupted in some subjects. Leaders recognise this and are acting appropriately. Some pupil groups report that they hear prejudicial language. Leaders are addressing this robustly. However, the impact of their actions has not been realised. A minority of pupils are persistently absent, but leaders are tackling the issue rigorously.

Pupils can participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school also provides the opportunity for pupils to take part in residential visits and trips. Pupils describe their annual Christmas trip to the cinema as something they enjoy.

There is a well-planned curriculum programme of personal, social and health education that enables pupils to understand their transition to adulthood. This programme is supported by regular assemblies which tackle issues such as misogyny and inequality. The school encourages pupil voice through the school council and parliament. There is representation from all year groups in these forums. Sixth-form students value the enrichment opportunities available to them, and the chance to become 'student leaders'. Students comment positively on the opportunity to help design the sixth-form block.

Leaders ensure that pupils and students are prepared for future learning or employment through their careers education, information and guidance programme. Sixth-form students have benefitted from, and enjoyed, a wide range of work experience placements. They also comment on the wealth of information provided to them to support their future career path. Pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) receive bespoke guidance when making options choices in Year 9, and support when moving on to higher or further education.

The school is well led and managed. Leaders understand that there are a small number of remaining improvements needed, and are taking effective action to address them. Governors have a robust understanding of the current position of the school. They have received appropriate training, and this enables them to challenge the headteacher and senior team. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors have a thorough understanding of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. They have received appropriate training. Leaders ensure that rigorous pre-employment checks are undertaken. These are recorded accurately. Safeguarding training for all staff goes beyond that which is required. Adults can confidently explain and navigate the school system for reporting concerns. Pupils know who to speak with if they have concerns. They also have a dedicated email address to report worries. Where concerns are reported, leaders act appropriately. They involve external agencies where this is required. Quick action is taken and is accurately recorded on the school safeguarding system.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not consistently apply the behaviour system. As a result, some pupils do not always demonstrate the types of behaviours expected and modelled by leaders. Leaders need to ensure that the behaviour system is implemented rigorously by all staff.
- The persistent absence of vulnerable pupils is too high. This prevents pupils from achieving well. Leaders should adopt a clear and well-communicated approach that ensures vulnerable pupils attend school more regularly.

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	117537
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255160
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
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	974
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Duncan Painter
Headteacher	Lucy Miles
Website	www.highfield.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 April 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school makes use of six alternative providers, three of which are unregistered.
- The number of pupils with an EHCP is well above average.
- The school has 16 out of the possible 17 ethnic groups.
- 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 inspector(s) carried out this graded inspection under section of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The lead inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, a local authority representative and representatives from the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: art, English, mathematics computer science, history and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum planning, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspection team spoke with staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and reviewed safeguarding records. The lead inspector also reviewed the single central record of pre-employment checks made on staff and reviewed information about the safer recruitment of staff.
- The inspection team met with pupils from different year groups to talk about their learning and experiences at school. Inspectors also reviewed 169 responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents provided by the school. These included the school development plan, curriculum documentation and school policies.
- Inspectors considered 86 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View. This included 54 comments from parents and carers in the free-text facility. Inspectors also considered the 44 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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