

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Bishop's Stortford High School

London Road, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3LU

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 May 2023

Outcome

The Bishop's Stortford High School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils achieve highly at this stunning school. They are challenged by the broad and ambitious curriculum that staff expertly deliver. Pupils respond well in lessons. They are articulate and express their opinions in a thoughtful and mature manner.

The 'black and gold spirit' permeates the school community. These are the school values that the pupils live by daily. Pupils are polite, well mannered and kind. They generously give their time to support one another, for example being reading buddies or setting up pupil welfare groups. Pupils' willingness to put others first is impressive. They enthusiastically fundraise for charity and contribute well to the local community, working with primary-age children and the elderly.

Behaviour is exemplary in lessons and around the school. Pupils feel safe to be themselves. There is little bullying because this does not fit with their respectful attitudes. Sixth formers are excellent role models for the younger pupils. Many run extra-curricular clubs and organise school events with governors and staff.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Reflecting the views of many, one parent summed up the school, 'It gives children the confidence to try things, the desire to do their best and the discipline to help them succeed.'

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

Leaders and teachers continue to deliver high-quality education. Many pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve success in the qualifications they undertake. A high proportion of pupils study the subjects for the English Baccalaureate. Sixth-form students regularly secure the top grades at A level.

The curriculum is thoughtfully planned and structured, so that pupils learn a wide breadth and balance of essential knowledge. Teachers look closely at what pupils know and can do. They skilfully ask pupils questions, which help them to reflect deeply on their

knowledge and understanding. Teachers are precise in their explanations, and they expect pupils to be equally as precise in their answers. Pupils rehearse their answers deftly using subject terminology. Teachers' sharp focus upon oral accuracy means that pupils translate this into excellent written work.

Sixth-form students are well supported by teachers who know their subject well. Students enjoy exploring their teachers' theses from their doctorate degrees. Teachers do not shy away from giving students complex material that undergraduates would study. They also make sure that they address misconceptions. Teachers give students one-to-one support should they need it. Students appreciate staff's willingness to go 'above and beyond' in the time they give.

Leaders and teachers have the same high expectations for pupils with SEND. Teachers know pupils well. They are adept at adapting the delivery of the curriculum to meet pupils' needs. Staff receive regular training, which helps them to apply the teaching strategies in pupils' support plans. This ensures that pupils with SEND engage enthusiastically and have access to the same ambitious curriculum as their peers.

The culture of scholarship and reading for pleasure is well established. There are many opportunities for pupils to read in the school day, for example, in form times and when using the library. Sixth-form students engage in paired reading with younger pupils. This helps pupils to develop their comprehension skills and their fluency. Pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge have access to support programmes, including phonics when needed. This means the few pupils who need additional support catch up quickly.

Leaders provide a truly all-round education. Pupils benefit from the extensive range of experiences that leaders have designed to enrich their wider development. When they join the school, all pupils are strongly encouraged to take part in the house competitions and the clubs. This is sustained in later years. There are many leadership opportunities, such as being house captain or school councillor, for pupils to enjoy. Having exposure early on to a wide set of experiences, including trips and competitions, means that pupils bond quickly and join in with the school's community spirit. Pupils are ambassadors for the school, demonstrating excellent behaviours in all that they do.

Pupils are ambitious for their futures. They receive helpful careers information, education, advice and guidance. They participate in a wide range of employer engagement activities, including work experience. This fully prepares them for their next steps.

Governors provide insightful challenge and support for leaders. They are not complacent. They continually seek ways to improve the quality of educational experience for pupils. Staff are immensely proud to work at the school. They feel supported with their workload and well-being. They share leaders' and governors' passion to continually develop the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff remain up to date with their safeguarding training. This includes keeping abreast of changes with online safety. This means pupils have a good understanding of the harmful effects of social media. Pupils know who to talk to should they have any concerns.

Staff follow readily the school's processes for identifying pupils that may be at risk. This enables leaders to take prompt action. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to make sure pupils and families get the help and support they need. Leaders are thorough with their record-keeping and undertake the necessary checks when appointing staff.

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 March 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

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| Unique reference number | 117577 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10255132 |
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Boys |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1189 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 339 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Alan Fordham |
| Headteacher | Dale Reeve |
| Website | www.tbshs.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 14 and 15 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school does not use alternative provision.
- 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 ungraded inspection under section 8 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 spoke with the chair and members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, staff and pupils about the school's provision.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in and around the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: history, mathematics, modern foreign languages, music and science. 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 spoke to leaders about the provision for reading. They observed the delivery of reading interventions.
- To ascertain the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the school's information on behaviour and bullying. In addition, they reviewed safeguarding records and spoke with governors, leaders, staff and pupils about safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors considered responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They also reviewed responses to Ofsted's staff survey and pupil survey.

Inspection team

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