

Inspection of a good school: Helsby High School

Chester Road, Helsby, Frodsham, Cheshire WA6 0HY

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 July 2023

Outcome

Helsby High School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Helsby High is a welcoming school. Pupils value the friendships that they forge with their classmates. They feel happy and enjoy their learning.

Leaders take effective steps to address behaviour that does not meet their high expectations. Most pupils conduct themselves well. Incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly by leaders. This helps pupils to feel safe.

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils to achieve well. Pupils appreciate the support that they receive from their teachers. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, receive a comprehensive careers programme. This helps pupils prepare well for their next steps. Most pupils achieve well. They make a successful transition to further education, apprenticeships or employment.

Pupils access a wide range of clubs. For instance, pupils enjoy developing their talents in athletics, netball and football. They relish the opportunities to perform for others through the choir and drama clubs. Pupils value clubs that nurture their talents beyond the classroom.

Pupils benefit from a range of visits that help to bring their learning to life. For instance, practising their grasp of the French language during a visit to Paris or learning about rivers in Wales. These visits help to nurture pupils' interests in different subject areas.

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

Leaders have crafted a broad and ambitious curriculum for all pupils, including those with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have successfully increased the uptake of the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. Students in the sixth form have access to a range of qualifications that suit their interests.

In the main, subject leaders have given thought to the key knowledge that they want pupils to learn. They have carefully considered the order in which pupils should learn new knowledge. Teachers use this information well to help pupils to make connections between previous learning and new content. As a result, most pupils achieve well and they are well prepared for each stage of their education.

Most teachers use their strong subject knowledge effectively to deliver the curriculum well. However, in some subjects, teachers do not teach the curriculum as it is intended. On occasion, teachers design learning activities that do not help pupils to build their knowledge over time. This hinders some pupils from knowing and remembering more.

Leaders have helped teachers to develop assessment strategies that are effective in identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers use assessment information well to address any misconceptions that pupils may have.

Leaders accurately identify the needs of pupils with SEND. They routinely share information about pupils' needs with teachers. Leaders have ensured that staff receive the training that they need to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. This enables pupils with SEND to learn alongside their peers and achieve well.

Leaders have begun to prioritise reading. They have placed an emphasis on developing pupils' vocabulary across the subjects, including in the sixth form. Leaders swiftly identify pupils who are struggling to read, especially at key stage 3. Although they have developed a programme to support pupils to catch up quickly, this has not been implemented. As such, weaker readers do not receive the support that they need. This means that some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or those with SEND, do not read as well as they should.

Pupils behave well in the classroom and at social times. Sixth-form students are polite and well mannered. They are keen to learn and do well. However, a small number of parents and carers expressed concerns over the behaviour in school. Leaders have acknowledged these concerns and they have improved their policies and staffing structure. This has supported leaders to manage pupils' behaviour consistently well.

Leaders have developed an effective personal, social and health education curriculum. All pupils, including students in the sixth form, learn how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy. For instance, pupils learn about dental health, mindfulness and anger management. They follow a programme which develops their personal attributes, such as leadership skills. Pupils also take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Such opportunities develop pupils' resilience and the spirit of teamwork.

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, have opportunities to serve their community. For example, the 'Snow Angel' pupil group support the elderly. Pupils take joy in fundraising and helping others, such as through the Christmas Hamper collection. This helps prepare pupils for life beyond school.

Governors have a clear understanding of the needs of the staff and pupils at the school. They hold leaders to account and sufficiently challenge the decisions leaders make.

However, governors and leaders do not engage with parents as well as they could. This leaves a small number of parents feeling that their concerns are not dealt with well. Staff told inspectors that leaders consult with them well when changes are introduced. They believe that they can manage their workload. Staff feel appreciated and enjoy working at this school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders take the safeguarding needs of pupils seriously. Staff receive regular training and understand the risks that pupils may face. Leaders work efficiently with the local authority and other support services. This helps to ensure that pupils and their families receive the support that they need.

Pupils understand that there are a range of risks that they could face. For instance, they know about knife crime, gambling, hate crime and drugs misuse. Pupils also know how to avoid toxic and unhealthy relationships. They know how to report concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not teach the curriculum as it is intended. At times, this means that some pupils do not build on their learning securely. Leaders should support teachers to design learning opportunities that help pupils know and remember more.
- Leaders do not offer sufficient support for pupils who struggle to read. This means that some pupils do not read as well as they should. Leaders should implement the new phonics programme to help pupils catch up quickly with their reading.
- Leaders and governors do not engage with parents as well as they could. This affects how well leaders identify and address parental concerns. Leaders and governors should improve how they engage with parents to support effective and productive partnerships between home and school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2014.

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	111440
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10290000
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
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	1331
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	184
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Ian Devereux-Roberts
Headteacher	Martin Hill
Website	www.helsbyhigh.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	22 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The current headteacher was appointed in January 2019.
- Two deputy headteachers, and four assistant headteachers were appointed in September 2022.
- Leaders use three registered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- 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. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders and subject leaders. Inspectors also met with a range of other staff and leaders during the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority and the school improvement partner.
- The inspectors observed pupils' and students' behaviour in class and as they moved around school. They also observed pupils and students at lunchtime.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, English, French and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders and teachers, visited a sample of lessons, reviewed samples of pupils' work and spoke with some pupils.
- Inspectors also met with subject leaders to review other areas of the curriculum.
- The inspection team analysed safeguarding documentation, including the single central record. Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils, staff and leaders to evaluate the culture of safeguarding in the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the leaders responsible for personal development, behaviour, sixth form, careers, SEND and reading.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including leaders' self-evaluation and attendance and behaviour records, the minutes from meetings of governors.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Amina Modan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Geoff Baker

Ofsted Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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