

Inspection of a good school: Harlow Fields School and College

Tending Road, Harlow, Essex CM18 6RN

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 September 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Harlow Fields School and College is a place where pupils are kind and respectful to each other. Staff ensure that pupils, including those with the most profound needs, are safe and well cared for.

Adults support pupils well to manage their complex emotions and feelings. This helps pupils to behave. On the playground, pupils interact positively with each other and staff. Pupils respect each other's differences and needs. Students in the sixth form act as excellent role models for the younger pupils.

Some of the clubs are only just returning, following the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, there are a range of experiences and activities that complement the curriculum. Regular trips out are thoughtful and engaging. Pupils visit local cafés and sports centres. This helps them to apply their learning from school. Pupils build their confidence by taking part in a wide range of theatrical productions. They also learn how to use public transport safely.

However, some curriculum documents are not clear enough. They do not tell teachers exactly what should be taught and when. Refinements are needed to check pupils' learning, and some staff do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve.

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

The school is reviewing many aspects of its work alongside pupils and their families. This includes relooking at the quality of the curriculum pupils receive. This is timely, as some parts of the curriculum are better than others. Several curriculum areas are not well sequenced. Curriculum documentation does not always articulate clearly what the school

wants pupils to be able to do and when. This makes it much harder for staff to plan effective lessons. In addition, some staff have low expectations of what pupils can achieve. They choose activities that are too easy or not well thought through. This hampers pupils' progress.

While some checks on pupils' learning are helpful and linked to the key knowledge, a few are not. Parts of some subjects are not checked at all. Therefore, staff do not always know how well pupils are progressing. Some systems that show how well pupils are doing lead to unnecessary activities for staff. This makes it harder for staff, as it negatively affects their workload.

Across the school, 'personal learning targets' identify pupils' individual special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers understand these documents and use them when planning lessons. For pupils with the most profound needs, staff know exactly what help the pupils need. This might be assistance with pupils' mobility, medical care or communication aids.

This positivity is echoed in the sixth form. On entry, staff check students' prior knowledge effectively. They then plug the gaps in what students need to know and do next. Students in the sixth form access a well-planned curriculum, shaped around their individual needs. Depending on these needs, students access two effective 'pathways' of learning. These pathways cover a range of topics and qualifications. High-quality careers guidance and work experience prepare students well for their next steps.

All pupils regularly read or are read to by adults. Staff bring stories alive using a range of sensory techniques to engage and stimulate all pupils. Staff support pupils to take the necessary small steps towards learning to read. They help pupils with important sounds and noises or share and repeat songs and rhymes. Staff adjust the effective phonics scheme appropriately. This helps many pupils to read independently.

Staff consistently deal with challenging and complex behaviour well. Regular training ensures staff know how to quickly de-escalate tricky situations and support pupils to manage their feelings. Additional therapies and external support work well and link closely to pupils' different needs. Consequently, the school is generally a calm place for pupils. Lessons are not often disrupted.

Pupils learn how to keep safe, for instance while online. Pupils learn about road safety and how to use transport. By the time pupils are in the sixth form, some can travel independently to workplaces or school. Relationships education teaches pupils about friendships in an effective, age-appropriate way.

The self-evaluation document shows that the school and the governing body are acutely aware of the issues with the curriculum. However, work to improve the school has only just begun, and so staff and pupils are yet to feel much benefit.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some curriculum areas lack detailed documents that outline what should be taught to pupils and when. This makes it difficult for staff to know what to teach and to know which activities would be most effective in supporting pupils with their varying needs. The school should ensure that all curriculum areas have appropriate documents in place and are linked to the sixth form. This documentation should provide staff with the detail they need to ensure all pupils progress through the curriculum as well as possible.
- Some staff do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can do. Some activities chosen are too easy or do not effectively support pupils to build on their knowledge and understanding. The school should ensure that all staff access training and development to support them to provide pupils with activities that ensure the curriculum is implemented well.
- Some assessment is not helpful to staff or does not exist. This makes it harder for staff to know how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum. In addition, some of the current practices create unnecessary workload for staff. The school should ensure that all assessment supports staff to know exactly how pupils are doing and does not create an unnecessary workload burden.

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 October 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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	131838
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10295020
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	153
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Paula Violet
Headteacher	Kathleen Faherty
Website	http://www.harlowfields.essex.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	3 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher joined the school in June 2023 and took up the substantive post from September 2023.
- The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, autism and severe learning disabilities. All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school's sixth form operates from a separate building on another, close by, site.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Due to the nature of the specialist curriculum, inspectors carried out deep dives in the following areas: communication; literacy and reading; personal, social, health and economic education (including relationships and sex education); and mathematics. In each area, inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at evidence of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector also reviewed curriculum documentation, visited lessons and spoke to leaders about expressive and creative arts.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of pupils from different classes across both days of inspection.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's behaviour systems, attendance information and logs of behaviour incidents.
- Inspectors scrutinised EHC plans and a sample of 'personal learning targets' across different classes.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with members of the governing body, including the chair, and a representative of the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector considered the 19 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 19 free-text responses. The lead inspector also considered 41 responses to Ofsted's survey of staff.

Inspection team

Damian Loneragan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Suzanne Thrower

Ofsted Inspector

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