

Inspection of a good school: High Close School

Wiltshire Road, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 1TS

Inspection dates:

12 and 13 September 2023

Outcome

High Close School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils speak highly of their education at High Close School. They feel accepted and cared for, and they thrive in this inclusive setting. Pupils who are new this term were seen to have settled quickly, and one told inspectors that they have already made new friends. Staff get to know pupils quickly and form strong and trusting relationships. This means that each pupil receives personalised support to help them to overcome any barriers to learning.

Expectations of behaviour are high. Well-established class routines help pupils to engage and focus on their learning. Adults take a consistent approach when providing additional support to pupils who need help to manage their behaviour. Pupils are actively involved in developing strategies to help them improve their self-regulation and understand their emotions.

Pupils are consistently encouraged to aim for success in their education. They understand that gaining qualifications is an important goal to work towards. This sense of purpose motivates them to persist in learning. While a range of study options are provided, leaders plan to develop this. They are keen to broaden pupils' aspirations for their post-16 education, training or employment.

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

The curriculum is designed to provide pupils with the knowledge and skills needed to access further education and employment when they leave High Close. Teachers and learning support assistants are skilled at checking pupils' understanding in lessons. They make sure they plan to revisit concepts that have not been fully grasped. Over time, the curriculum is sequenced towards pupils gaining recognised qualifications. For many pupils, this enables them to confidently transition on to further education settings. However, leaders know that there are not yet enough varied opportunities for pupils to fully explore a broader range of future pathways. Currently, there are limited opportunities to explore the world of work through the current curriculum offer. Work experience and curriculum learning

do not always link together to inspire pupils to form a wider picture of their future options. Leaders aspire to develop the whole curriculum to include more opportunities to explore vocational pathways and purposeful, world-of-work learning pathways.

When pupils join the school, leaders and staff quickly gather detailed knowledge of the needs of pupils. Education, health and care (EHC) plans are used to inform provision. Skilled staff, including therapists, use tailored assessments to swiftly identify any gaps in learning. This information is used to set highly personalised, holistic and academic targets. Teachers use useful 'snapshot sheets' that detail this information to incorporate individual targets into lessons. This provides pupils with plenty of opportunities to work towards their individual outcomes. Careful thought is given to class groupings and getting the environment for learning right. Staff expertly promote pupils' independence and self-esteem. As a result, pupils learn to make positive choices and develop a sense of responsibility for their actions.

All pupils who need it receive additional support to improve their reading and literacy. If pupils have gaps in their phonic knowledge, targeted interventions are put in place to overcome this. Staff are trained to deliver a phonics programme for those pupils who need it. Pupils who require additional help with their reading comprehension are also appropriately supported. Staff are keen to continue to develop their approaches to creating a culture that promotes a love of reading.

Pupils' personal development is well catered for. They are motivated to gain reward points for their achievements and efforts. Pupils eagerly anticipate spending their reward points at the 'trading post' at the end of term. The school council is currently reforming through a democratic voting process. The school is currently reviewing how trips and visits are incorporated to bring learning to life through each subject area.

Many governors are new to their role and do not yet have a clear understanding of how to carry out their responsibilities. This includes assuring themselves of the effectiveness of actions around the school's improvement priorities. This is currently impacting on their ability to provide effective challenge and support. Nevertheless, governors have a strong sense of commitment to work with the school to drive forward improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Governors do not yet have clear oversight of school improvement priorities, including curriculum development. This means that actions to improve the school are not always focused clearly enough on the right priorities. Governors should urgently sharpen their monitoring processes so they can evaluate the full impact of the school's work and therefore provide the necessary challenge and support.

- The school's curriculum offer for careers education (including vocational elements) does not yet fully realise leaders' aspirations for all pupils. This means that not all pupils access a broad, well-organised, and clearly sequenced curriculum that inspires and prepares them for success in their next steps in education and/or employment. Leaders should continue to review and improve this aspect of the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils.

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 2018.

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	110181
Social care unique reference number	SC011327
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	10269139
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Number of boarders on roll	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Pat Kerton
Principal	Wendy Gosling (Acting principal)
Website	www.highclose.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	13 and 14 December 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- High Close is a non-maintained special school with residential provision and is owned by Barnardo's. The school caters for pupils aged from seven to 18 years.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities or an EHC plan. The vast majority of pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs, and many have other identified needs, including speech, language and communication needs, autism and/or other medical needs.
- Pupils attending the school come from over 20 different local authorities.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the residential provision.
- Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and learning support assistants.
- The lead inspector met with representatives from the governing body, including the chair and with a representative from Barnardo's.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- 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.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents shared through Ofsted Parent View. They gathered the views of pupils and staff through surveys and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including school improvement documentation and governing body minutes.

Inspection team

Jo Petch, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Sackett

His Majesty's Inspector

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