

Inspection of a good school: The Helix Education Centre

94 Uxbridge Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 6DH

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 November 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?

Pupils said that they are happy at this school. They find that they work better in the small teaching groups than they did in their previous schools. Staff focus sharply on building strong and trusting working relationships with every pupil. Pupils highlighted that teachers and support staff, help you to think about your behaviour.' Staff teach and encourage pupils to socialise with respect. They help them to re-engage positively in learning. As a result, pupils improve their behaviours and get on well with one another and with the adults in the school. Pupils feel confident to speak to adults about any worries and concerns they may have about their welfare or safety.

The school has high aspirations for all pupils' social development and academic achievement. It is effective in preparing pupils for re-entry into mainstream schools. Leaders and staff develop the dispositions pupils need to do so successfully. The school provides much provision to help pupils to become worthy citizens. However, there are weaknesses in the development of secondary pupils' literacy skills. This prevents these pupils from achieving as well as they could.

Parents and carers value the strong communications they have with the school. They praise the transformative work the school does with their children.

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

Pupils who join this provision have had poor experiences in their mainstream schools. This may include poor attitudes, behaviours and attendance. Some have been excluded. This school, therefore, prioritises working with pupils to help them improve their behaviours. Staff make lessons enjoyable and engaging, so pupils learn to value being in the classroom. Each pupil has an appointed key worker, who mentors and supports them. Key workers set and regularly review pupils' personal targets for behaviour, learning and

attendance. They offer encouragement and rewards. Staff also care deeply for their pupils, which results in pupils collaborating well with them. As a result, as they settle down in this provision, pupils begin to improve their attendance. They behave well around the school and in lessons. They learn to make an effort to gain new knowledge and understanding. This work pays off. Most pupils who join before Year 11, reintegrate successfully into mainstream schools.

The school carries out a range of general assessments when pupils join the school. They use this information effectively, adapting the curriculum and teaching to meet pupils' needs. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff keep pupils' progress against their targets under regular review. They make changes as needed when pupils fall short of their targets.

The school's primary curriculum and its delivery is strong. In the secondary phase, specialists usually teach the various subjects. They think carefully about what they want pupils to know and remember. Teachers and support staff work in close collaboration. Together, they ensure that pupils are set activities that meet their specific needs and interests. They build pupils' knowledge step by step in a logical way. As a result, pupils gain some new knowledge and skills during their time at the school.

The teaching of reading in the primary phase is a high priority. Primary staff have the expertise to teach phonics effectively. They keep a close eye on pupils' progress. Each pupil is supported to catch up quickly if they are behind where they should be. As a result, primary pupils become confident and fluent readers. However, this is not the case in the secondary phase. There are pupils who join the school with poor reading and writing skills. The school has been slow in assessing and identifying pupils' specific literacy knowledge and skills gaps. The school does not give the support these pupils need to become fluent readers and able writers. This also limits their success in other subjects, beyond English.

The school's programme to support pupils' personal development is strong. Staff encourage pupils to respect people with protected characteristics. Pupils are taught how to build healthy relationships. Many external visitors offer a range of activities and workshops. Pupils have opportunities to play various sports and build social skills. They get to hear from a range of speakers. For example, those involved in the criminal justice system and a talk by a mother who lost her child to knife crime. The school provides pupils with a clear programme of impartial careers advice. Year 11 pupils take part in work experience. Most Year 11 pupils continue their education in colleges. They choose from a range of courses such as business, travel and tourism and plumbing.

Staff appreciate the openness and personal support they get from school leaders. However, with the ongoing staff shortages, which they cover, their workload has increased.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils in the secondary phase that are behind in their reading and writing skills do not routinely receive the bespoke support they need to catch up quickly. This prevents them from accessing the broader curriculum successfully and progressing further in their educational journey. The school should ensure that they assess pupils' reading and writing skills thoroughly on arrival and provide intensive support to all those who are behind where they should be.

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 November 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	102180
Local authority	Harrow
Inspection number	10293233
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	32
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Seeta Mepani
Headteacher	Paa-King Maselino
Website	www.thehelix.harrow.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Helix Education Centre provides for pupils who have been excluded from mainstream school or who have been out of school for reasons related to their behaviour. These pupils have often moved or had exclusions from more than one school. The pupil population changes throughout the year as the centre also provides short respite packages for pupils from local mainstream schools who are at risk of exclusion.
- In addition, the centre runs an education service at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital for children and young people admitted as patients on a short-term, medium-term or recurring basis. These children remain on the roll of their home schools. It also provides home tuition for pupils who are unable to attend school because they are physically or mentally ill.
- The school has several unfilled staff vacancies, including at senior leadership level. For several months some staff have been on long-term absence.
- The current chair of the management committee took up her post in September 2023.
- Currently, the school uses one registered alternative provision, offering pupils part of their education in a mainstream school.

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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and science. 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 considered other subjects as part of the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They spoke with the lead teacher for the education service at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital. They also spoke with the vice chair of the management committee and also spoke with two representatives of the local authority. Inspectors also spoke on the telephone with a sample of headteachers and parents who use the centre's services.
- 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 reviewed a range of documentation, including looking at records of pupils' behaviour and submissions from some medical staff at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital who work with the school team. Inspectors also had formal meetings with staff and with pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey. They also considered the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Diane Rochford

Ofsted Inspector

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