

# Inspection of an outstanding school: High Cliff Academy

Southdown Road, Newhaven, East Sussex BN9 9FD

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Inspection dates:

21 and 22 November 2023

## Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding 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.

The headteacher is Carla Botting. This school is part of STEP Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Paul Glover, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ross Gardner. There is also an executive headteacher, Zoe Griffiths, who is responsible for this school and two others.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to this welcoming and inclusive school. Staff are committed to improving the life chances of all pupils. These aspirations are reflected in an ambitious curriculum and a sharp focus on personal development throughout school life. From Nursery to the end of Year 6, pupils are supported well with their learning. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive the extra help they need to experience the same rich opportunities as everyone else.

Overall, the school is calm and orderly. Staff have developed a clear behaviour policy that is understood and followed by almost everyone. Teachers set high expectations and reward pupils when they demonstrate the school's values of passion, urgency, positivity, aspiration, and commitment. A small minority of pupils are receiving useful support to help them make more positive choices about their behaviour.

Bullying is rare. When it does happen, staff take swift and effective action. Pupils say they can always talk to a trusted adult in the school if they have any concerns. This helps them feel safe and happy in school.

Pupils enjoy regular visits to their local area and beyond. Drama and karate clubs are popular and well attended. Pupils proudly take on responsibilities, such as being on the 'pupil parliament' or being a library monitor.

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

The school is ambitious for pupils to receive a high-quality education. The curriculum has been ordered logically to ensure pupils build knowledge over time. In all subjects, careful thought has been given to the important knowledge that pupils should learn. Mostly, clear curriculum planning supports teachers successfully to deliver high-quality lessons, and pupils are achieving well. In a small number of foundation subjects, curriculum planning does not support teachers as well as it might in knowing precisely what to teach and when.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. They present new learning clearly and confidently explain concepts in a way that helps pupils to understand. They provide effective support to pupils with SEND, whose needs are identified quickly. In most subjects, assessment is used well to identify where pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Mostly, staff successfully adapt the delivery of the curriculum to address any deficits in pupils' learning. Consequently, most pupils achieve well across the curriculum. However, in a small number of subjects, work is not ambitious enough and does not always build on what pupils already know. In addition, misconceptions are not always identified and addressed before moving on to new learning. As a result, some pupils are not able to recall some of the important knowledge outlined in the school's intended curriculum.

Reading is a clear priority at this school. Well-trained staff teach phonics systematically. This starts in the early years. Pupils are supported to practise using this phonics knowledge with books that have been precisely matched to the sounds they know. Pupils look forward to daily story time with excitement, and staff make all reading activities engaging. Older pupils relish reading the diverse range of books the school has chosen and are keen to debate their favourite authors. As a result, pupils are supported effectively to become accurate and confident readers. Leaders are working to further improve pupils' reading fluency and comprehension, which adversely affected examination outcomes at the end of Year 6 last year.

Most pupils behave well and attend school regularly. Disruption to lessons is rare, and pupils' conduct is positive. However, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing minority have struggled to meet the school's high expectations. Some, particularly those who are disadvantaged, do not attend school often enough. Leaders are doing all that they reasonably can to support these pupils in attending more regularly and improving their behaviour. This work is beginning to have an impact.

Pupils benefit from a well-considered approach to personal development. The school understands the local context and ensures that pupils are provided with suitable knowledge of how to keep themselves safe. This includes making appropriate choices when they are working or playing online. Pupils enjoy visits to the local lifeboat and fire stations.

Senior leaders have successfully managed a period of change in the school. Useful collaboration work with other schools is proving to be helpful and effective. Leaders are mindful of staff workload and well-being. Governors and trustees have a thorough understanding of the school and perform their statutory and delegated duties well.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### What does the school need to do to improve?

#### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of foundation subjects, the curriculum is not as coherent as leaders intend. This means that teachers are not always clear on what needs to be taught and in what order. Leaders should ensure that all areas of the curriculum are coherently planned so that teachers have a clear understanding of what they need to teach and when.
- In a small number of subjects, the curriculum is not taught as well as it could be. As a result, some pupils do not always learn and remember important knowledge. The school should ensure that ongoing support enables staff to match learning activities consistently well to what pupils need to learn next, checking that new knowledge has been retained.
- An increasing minority of pupils do not attend or behave as well as they should. This impacts on their learning and sometimes causes upset or frustration to other pupils. The school should continue to ensure that its work to support this small group of pupils leads to further improvements in their behaviour and attendance.

## 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 5 and 6 June 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

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| <b>Unique reference number</b>             | 140385   |
| <b>Local authority</b>                     | East Sussex  |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                   | 10296396   |
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Primary  |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Academy sponsor-led  |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 3 to 11  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed  |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 183  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | Board of trustees  |
| <b>Chair of trust</b>                      | Ross Gardner   |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Carla Botting  |
| <b>Website</b>                             | <a href="http://www.highcliffacademy.org">www.highcliffacademy.org</a> |
| <b>Dates of previous inspection</b>        | 5 and 6 June 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005           |

## Information about this school

- The school is part of STEP Academies Trust.
- The school is governed by the trust and by a local academy committee with delegated powers.
- The school does not use any alternative provision currently.
- The school has a nursery provision on site and a breakfast club run by an external provider.

## 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. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with the headteacher, other school leaders and teaching staff. The inspector also met with the chief executive officer of the trust, trust leaders, the vice chair of the trust and the chair of the local academy committee.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector 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.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents, including those relating to behaviour, attendance and SEND.
- The inspector considered the view of pupils, parents and staff through discussions during the inspection and through the Ofsted surveys.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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.

### **Inspection team**

James Stuart, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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