

Inspection of The Norton Knatchbull School

Hythe Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 0QJ

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 December 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Previous inspection grade	Good
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The headteacher of this school is Ben Greene. This school is part of The Norton Knatchbull School trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, known as a board of governors, chaired by Jane Burnett.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school lives up to its promise of a vibrant learning environment where young people are nurtured to become considerate, confident and well-rounded individuals. Across the school, there is a powerful sense of community. Expectations are high. Relationships are strong and pupils care for one another. Pupils feel safe, and they are safe.

Behaviour and attitudes in most lessons are excellent, particularly for older pupils who are highly motivated, enthusiastic and focused. Pupils feel valued. They know that they can talk with a member of staff if they have any concerns. Health, welfare and well-being are extremely well supported through the highly regarded personal development programme.

There is an extensive range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. These include a debating club and a medical society as well as sports, choir, jazz and string ensembles. Pupils run several clubs themselves, including a French club, a history club and a magician club. The provision is supplemented by a diverse range of local and international visits.

Leaders have worked exceptionally hard to address the issues raised at last year's ungraded inspection. The curriculum in key stage 3 has been completely overhauled. Across all subjects, the curriculum is now carefully planned, sequenced and organised. Leaders, including governors, have instilled a real sense of purpose and determination across the whole school.

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

The curriculum is coherently and ambitiously planned. A recent review and evaluation have ensured that pupils study the full curriculum. The proportion of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is well above the government's target. However, especially in Year 9, there is still too much focus on GCSE requirements rather than developing the curriculum in greater depth, breadth and richness. The revised curriculum is still being embedded, adapted and tailored. Consequently, the quality of education is not yet consistently secure across all subjects.

The small number of disadvantaged pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are well known, and their needs are understood. Adults adapt learning to meet pupils' needs sensitively. The most able pupils are actively supported to excel through seminars, competitions and the 'super curriculum'.

Teachers have a strong subject knowledge, and present information clearly and concisely. Pupils spontaneously ask questions to deepen their learning, demonstrating high levels of intellectual curiosity. Assessment routines are carefully

considered to ensure that they have maximum impact for pupils and are manageable for teachers.

Literacy and oracy are developed well. In contrast, pupils' written presentation skills are more variable. There is a strong focus on reading, with additional and effective support for those falling behind. Links with other subjects are not always pursued to support pupils' wider knowledge and understanding as well as they could be.

The personal development programme is broad, detailed and impressive. Pupils' books evidence coverage of xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, body positivity and staying safe online. Pupils are less confident at talking about British values and linking these to the school values of mutual respect that are based on care, integrity and trust. Planning for personal development learning in tutor time is well structured, but delivery is not consistently effective.

The careers programme is carefully constructed to enable pupils to make informed life choices. Local businesses and companies support pupils well with work experience, job applications, CV writing and job interviews. Technical qualifications are promoted alongside degree apprenticeships. The impact of careers education is evidenced through the large numbers of students proceeding to highly regarded universities.

Students in the sixth form have well-embedded and positive study habits. They routinely model exemplary manners and demonstrate high levels of independence. They are well drilled for exam success, but the quality of their learning experience is occasionally compromised by an over-emphasis on external examinations. Students are encouraged to explore and celebrate diversity. Girls enrolled in the sixth form feel included and welcomed.

Leaders are working exceptionally hard to embed recent changes to the curriculum and ensure greater consistency in how it is delivered. Subject leaders are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and ambitious for all pupils. They have a well-honed appreciation of the importance of the curriculum. Staff are proud to work in the school. They are happy, and they say their workload is well managed.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school and its current strengths and weaknesses. The school acknowledges that further work is needed to ensure that pupils with SEND and sixth form girls come to school more often. Poor punctuality is being addressed. The new behaviour for learning policy has ensured a much more clear and consistent approach to behaviour management.

Trustees are clear and confident about their roles and responsibilities. Minutes and records show that they ensure that school resources are managed well and that leaders are held to account for the quality of education. Trustees actively engage in the school development plan and appreciate the importance of careful self-evaluation.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Learning occasionally relies too heavily on preparing pupils for external examinations. This means that pupils do not always make meaningful connections across different areas of learning. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum develops pupils' creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, thus enabling all pupils to thrive and succeed.
- Leaders recognise that the quality of education is not yet secure across all subjects. This means that, in a small number of subjects, implementation is variable and not yet fully embedded. Leaders should continue to ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently by sharing the very best practice which already exists.

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	138019
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10288014
Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1252
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	239
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jane Burnett
Headteacher	Ben Greene
Website	www.nks.kent.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	19 and 20 October 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Norton Knatchbull School is an above-average sized 11 to 18 boys' grammar school with an above-average sized sixth form. The school admits girls into the sixth form.
- The school is operated by the Norton Knatchbull School trust, which is a single academy trust. The headteacher is the accounting officer for the trust. The board of trustees is known as the board of governors.
- One pupil attends alternative provision at a registered education provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in English, mathematics, history, physical education, modern foreign languages, and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, talked with teachers, spoke to pupils and students, and looked at samples of their work.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, staff, students and pupils. They spoke to a group of early career teachers and their mentors about training and support.
- They looked at school policies, curriculum documentation, behaviour logs, attendance records and destination statistics.
- The lead inspector met with trustees and spoke with a representative of the alternative provision school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to the Ofsted Parent View online questionnaire and additional written comments from parents. They reviewed the survey returns completed by staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Paul Metcalf, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Baker	Ofsted Inspector
Christie Ransom	Ofsted Inspector
Tash Hurtado	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Potten	Ofsted Inspector

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