

Inspection of a good school: Holbrook Academy

Ipswich Road, Holbrook, Ipswich, Suffolk IP9 2QX

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 June 2024

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.

The acting headteacher of this school is George Anstee-Parry. This school is a single academy trust which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Helen Butler.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have a mixed experience of school. They enjoy seeing their friends, socialising and going on school trips. They benefit from a curriculum which also celebrates the local maritime industry. This includes work experience, employer talks and opportunities to go sailing. However, in their words, some lessons are 'stressful' for pupils. This is when pupils do not behave as they should. Too much talk and not enough focus on the task at hand frustrates pupils who want to learn. The turnover of staff has not helped with this. For some classes, routines of the classroom are taking time to embed.

At social times, pupils mingle well. They like playing football, taking part in clubs, and competing over a game of mahjong. There are several opportunities to develop leadership skills and to demonstrate the school's values. For example, pupils are keen fundraisers for an orphanage in Uganda. Pupils are excited to go on the trip to Tanzania to do voluntary work this summer.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive one-to-one support from dedicated staff at The Mayhew Centre. Like their peers, they benefit from several digital platforms to support their learning.

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

The school has been through a challenging period. There have been several headteachers over a short space of time. Numerous long-term serving staff left taking 'institutional memory' with them. While staffing is stabilising, many are getting to grips with new curriculums and procedures.

In subjects that are well-established, pupils typically learn well. This is because teachers teach a carefully considered curriculum. Pupils are clear about the key knowledge they need to know. They retain important information because teachers provide opportunities to revisit their learning. Teachers check what pupils know and can do. They make sure that work is appropriately pitched for pupils' abilities. In some subjects, the curriculum is in the process of review. The churn of staff means key initiatives for delivery of the curriculum have not stuck. For instance, the school provided training for the best ways of supporting reading in lessons prior to staff leaving. In some subject areas, the constant use of cover has led to a disconnected learning experience for pupils. This has also increased workload for some staff.

The reading culture at the school has waned. Pupils have got out of the habit of reading for pleasure. Pupils who need support with reading comprehension have bespoke programmes via the Student Success Centre (SSC). This has positive impact with pupils gaining confidence in understanding what they have read. As yet, there is not a phonics programme in place for those pupils who are learning to read.

The school has appropriate procedures for the identification and support of pupils with SEND. Teachers use pupils' support plans to adjust their lessons so that pupils with SEND effectively learn the curriculum. Such strategies do not work so well when pupils disrupt learning. As a result, pupils with SEND have the same experience in lessons as their non-SEND peers.

The school is turning a corner with improving behaviour. Suspensions and the use of isolation is reducing. Movement around the site is calm. There is better support for pupils with complex behavioural needs. This is because there is more staffing in the pastoral support team. There is a new leadership structure with heads of year. These changes are having impact.

Pupils follow a comprehensive life skills curriculum, including careers. There are activities such as trips and guest speakers that are linked to the curriculum. Pupils also undertake activities week which provides wider experiences. The school's lunchtime was extended to facilitate the running of clubs. However, the school does not have a clear view of the extent of the offer or the take up. An audit for this is underway.

Governors are asking the right questions and seeking appropriate support for the school so that it gets back on track. They, along with school leaders, clearly understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. They visit regularly to see improvements first-hand. They have made sure that staff are looked after through well-being initiatives while there are greater demands.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

While the school's record-keeping is not as detailed as it should be, the school's safeguarding team keep vulnerable pupils safe. They liaise with external agencies to

ensure vulnerable pupils have the support they need. Sometimes, key information from conversations with pupils are not noted. Some communications with external agencies are kept in different places rather than on the pupils' file on the central electronic recording system. However, the safeguarding team brief each other on cases in a weekly briefing.

Staff are alert to the signs of abuse. They know how to report a concern should they need to. Staff receive regular training and are up to date in their knowledge of the latest government guidance.

The trust ensures that the school employs staff after making the necessary pre-employment checks. They make regular checks to monitor the delivery of the school's safeguarding policy. This includes commissioning external consultants to provide an audit of provision.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils' experience of learning the curriculum varies across the school. In some subject areas, the delivery of the curriculum works well. Where it does not work well, pupils have disconnected learning episodes. In some lessons this is due to cover where work may be repeated or insufficiently delivered. In others it is due to pupils' misbehaviour. The school needs to provide further training focusing on improving staff's delivery of the curriculum, so pupils engage with their learning and achieve well.
- The development of a reading culture is in its infancy. Some pupils do not value the importance of reading and choose not to read. As yet, the school does not have a phonics programme in place to support those pupils who are learning to read. The school has an action plan to improve provision for reading and to run further training for staff. The school needs to implement its plan so that the reading culture is re-energised and pupils value its importance.
- While suspensions are reducing, they are too high. Too many pupils do not follow teachers' instructions and disrupt lessons. This is particularly the case in key stage 3 where pupils talk too much, distract themselves and do not focus on the learning at hand. The school should continue its efforts to improve behaviour, ensuring staff follow the behaviour policy consistently and pupils develop positive learning behaviours.
- The school's procedures for sharing and recording information about safeguarding are not as robust as they should be. Sometimes, information about pupils' welfare and communications with other professionals are held in different places or are not recorded in detail. The school needs to improve arrangements for noting, reporting and sharing information about pupils' welfare and safety.

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 2015.

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	137208
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10345317
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	582
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Helen Butler
Headteacher	George Anstee-Parry
Website	www.holbrookacademy.org
Date(s) of previous inspection	26 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The current senior leadership team is newly formed this year. Most have previously held positions of responsibility in the school. They have stepped up to undertake acting roles. A new substantive headteacher joins the school in September 2024.
- The school is part of a single academy trust. There is a governing body which has delegated responsibility to oversee the school.
- The school uses six alternative providers, four of which are unregistered.
- 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.
- At the time of the inspection Year 11 were on study leave. Half of Year 10 were out of school visiting post 16 providers for one day.

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.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the trust and representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders and staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: design technology, history, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive the 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.
- The lead inspector also considered the provision for physical education (PE) and how the school supports pupils who are learning to read.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times. Inspectors considered pupils' views about behaviour in school. They also spoke with staff about pupils' behaviour and staff's workload and well-being.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys. They considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. The lead inspector also spoke to a parent and read a letter.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Polly Lankester

Ofsted Inspector

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