

# Inspection of Hitchin Girls' School

Highbury Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9RS

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Inspection dates:	8 and 9 October 2024
The quality of education	<b>Outstanding</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is James Crowther. This school is a single-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, James Crowther, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Nesta Job.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since June 2013. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

The school's values are lived and breathed by pupils and staff. Leaders have high ambitions for all pupils and strive to have any barriers to success removed. Pupils relish reaching their goals and their successes are reflected in their achievements, including in national assessments which are exceptionally strong.

Pupils learn how to stay safe, including when online. They know how to raise concerns and feel confident in doing so. Pupils behave well and are kind to each other.

Pupils enjoy welcoming others to their community. Sixth-form students play active roles in creating and maintaining a positive school environment and culture. For example, through peer mentoring programmes and as student ambassadors. The peer mentors commit to a series of training sessions to enable them to support the wider work of the school. Younger pupils value the example sixth-form students set and aspire to these roles. Cross-year groups of students volunteer in the library and promote a positive reading culture at the school.

Pupils benefit from the provision on offer which goes beyond the academic. For example, pupils take part in a wide range of activities to develop their interests, including cheerleading, brass band and 'project polyglot'. Students lead many of these activities and their work supports the wider community of Hitchin.

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

Leaders have carefully crafted a curriculum that is broad and ambitious for all pupils. In places, this goes beyond that expected nationally, with all pupils having access to Latin and classical civilisation in Year 7 to Year 9. In each subject, including vocational courses, leaders have sequenced the important knowledge and skills that pupils need to secure. Teachers use their subject expertise very well. They give pupils timely feedback in lessons and address any misconceptions promptly. Pupils benefit from using the school's online resources. For example, they see high-quality examples of work before they complete their own.

Pupils have ample opportunity to practise key concepts until they are embedded. For example, in art and design, pupils in Year 7 begin by learning core and visual language to build on what was taught during the primary phase. This then supports pupils to appraise art with precision and communicate more complex ideas through their compositions. Similarly, in geography, pupils are supported to use accurate technical language to explain processes. For example, this supports older pupils in writing detailed evaluations on the demographic transition model and rural-to-urban migration. Across the school, pupils develop an impressive understanding in a range of subjects. This means that pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education or training.

Reading is a high priority. Leaders work to identify any gaps in reading knowledge early so that pupils are helped to catch up rapidly. This means that all pupils can read widely and access the full curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities

(SEND) are identified quickly. Staff receive appropriate training to make adaptations to their teaching and the curriculum as needed. As a result, pupils with SEND are well supported and included in the full life of the school.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Bullying is extremely rare. Pupils trust that leaders will deal with any issues swiftly. Pupils benefit from high-quality pastoral support. Attendance and punctuality are closely monitored and in line with national expectations. As a result, pupils experience a disruption-free learning environment.

The programme for pupils' wider personal development is exceptional. Pupils learn about shared values, including respect and diversity. Lessons link to the tutor programme, including house assemblies, so that pupils have opportunities to embed their understanding further. The school's values are carefully threaded through the school's curriculum. For example, the curriculum is planned to support pupils to learn about different cultures such as by studying lesser-known writers in literature and philosophy. Pupils then have opportunities to deepen their understanding through celebration days. There are carefully selected visitors and trips out.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, receive a well-considered programme of careers advice and support. The targeted programme of visitors helps pupils to be well prepared for the world of work. Leaders think carefully about the choices for work experience. Coaching is provided before placements so that pupils develop both the academic and personal skills they need.

Leaders have strong, shared values and model this practice for staff and pupils. Staff feel the school balances 'tradition with innovation'. As a result, leaders continuously strive to create the best opportunities for pupils to succeed in an ever-changing social context. Those responsible for governance fulfil their statutory duties. They support and provide appropriate challenge for leaders towards improvement. Consequently, all pupils benefit from the high-quality education on offer.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137288
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10345320
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Girls
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,357
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	308
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Nesta Job
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	James Crowther
<b>Headteacher</b>	James Crowther
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.hgs.herts.sch.uk">www.hgs.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	19 and 20 June 2013, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

## Information about this school

- The school runs its own breakfast club and after-school clubs.
- The school currently uses two registered alternative provisions. The school also makes some use of off-site therapeutic services.
- The school is part of the Hitchin Consortium, a group of three local schools that work closely together.
- 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.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 inspector held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the trust and trustees. She also spoke with the local authority school improvement adviser.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, geography, art and design, science and religious education. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work. The inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects.
- Some sixth-form students undertake some of their studies at the two other schools which are part of the Hitchin Consortium. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with some students about their learning and looked at samples of their work. Inspectors did not visit the other schools in the consortium as these are inspected separately.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record of pre-employment checks; 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.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation provided by leaders, including their priorities for improvement.
- The inspectors considered the views of parents, pupils and staff through discussions and their responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

## Inspection team

Matea Marcinko, lead inspector

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