

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Hills Academy

Stancliffe Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK41 9AT

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 March 2025

Outcome

The Hills Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Moya Whitehead. This school is part of The Hills Academy, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by the board of trustees chaired by Nicci Henson.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils become confident and independent individuals in this welcoming and inclusive school. They develop positive attitudes to learning and understand the importance of learning from mistakes. This builds their resilience and motivates them to persist when they find things tricky. These behaviours contribute to pupils achieving well in national tests and developing skills that will serve them well for the future.

Pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school is purposeful. Pupils are kind and respectful. They happily play games together at breaktimes, taking turns practising their basketball skills. Older pupils act responsibly in their leadership roles. They support the well-being of others and organise playtime games. Pupils know their views are shared through the school council to improve their school. They talk proudly of the outdoor equipment they now have because of their feedback.

Pupils develop a strong understanding of how to stay safe online, as well as how to keep physically and mentally healthy. All pupils learn to swim and understand water safety. Pupils know it is important to talk about any worries. They appreciate the pastoral support available to them and find 'worry boxes' a helpful way of letting teachers know if they need support.

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

Since the last inspection, the school's work to develop the expertise of subject leaders has had a substantial impact. The curriculum is well planned and teacher's professional development leads to effective teaching. Trustees have a clear strategic oversight of the school. They monitor overall performance and ensure resources are allocated effectively to support pupils' progress. This contributes to pupils achieving exceptionally well in mathematics and reading.

Familiar lesson routines help pupils focus on learning. Teachers introduce new ideas and concepts clearly. They model these and invite pupils to contribute, so they can check their understanding and correct any misconceptions. This helps pupils remember what they have been taught. The school's focus on oracy is developing pupils' effective communication skills and confidence. Pupils learn to build on each other's ideas and respectfully challenge one another.

Pupils are enthusiastic about reading. They enjoy discussions about the social and moral dilemmas some books evoke. The school's ongoing focus on early reading and swift identification of pupils that need extra practise to catch up is resulting in improving outcomes. In key stage 1, some pupils receive extra help with their writing because they have not been able to keep up with the intended curriculum and are not yet forming letters consistently well. This hinders their writing fluency and readiness for the next stage of learning.

Well-trained staff help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to make excellent progress towards their targets. Teachers ensure adaptations meet pupils needs and enable active participation in class. Pupils with SEND are fully involved in the life of the school. Extra activities help them develop skills for the future, such as touch typing.

From the early years, children develop a sense of belonging. They form warm, positive relationships with staff, which helps them settle quickly. Children learn to count and enjoy number games, forming secure foundations in their mathematical knowledge. Carefully selected stories help expand children's vocabulary. Children enjoy using a wide range of tools for mark making and early writing. While some children make controlled marks and persevere in their writing, they use an incorrect pencil grip. As this is not consistently addressed, they form habits that hinder their writing fluency as they progress through the curriculum. Sometimes, when children are learning through play, those that need the most support do not always receive it. This means they do not make the progress in their learning that they could.

Pupils benefit from an extensive suite of experiences that broadens their development. Engaging clubs such as coding, jewellery making and cooking develop new interests and talents. Trips and visits enrich the curriculum and develop pupil's cultural awareness, such as visiting different places of worship to help their learning about world faiths. Pupils develop resilience and independence as part of residential trips. They are proud of their success in climbing high ropes and managing a treetop trail. Frequent outdoor learning

activities contribute to developing pupils' character as they interact with each other, working on a common purpose, such as planting the garden area.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. They understand the rules and appreciate teachers' consistent and fair management of any incidents. The school diligently checks pupil attendance and works closely with families of pupils with high absence rates, so their attendance improves.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In the early years foundation stage, there are instances where children that need the most support do not always receive it in the timeliest way. This means not all children make the progress in their learning that they could. Leaders should ensure that all children, particularly the most disadvantaged and vulnerable receive frequent high-quality interactions that supports the intent of their ambitious curriculum.
- The quality of some pupils' writing is variable, which makes it harder for them to keep up with the intended curriculum. This is because they do not form their letters accurately, which in turn prevents them from developing the writing fluency they need in key stage 2. Leaders should identify early on the pupils that may be at risk of falling behind in their writing and establish an effective programme that develops secure handwriting and fluency over time, starting from the early years.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 good for overall effectiveness in 5 and 6 February 2020.

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	139522
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10378527
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	437
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Nicci Henson
Headteacher	Moya Whitehead
Website	www.thehillsacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 February 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- In April 2013, the school converted to a stand-alone academy. The board of trustees, known as the governing body, is the accountable body.
- The school offers nursery provision for children aged three years old.

Information about this inspection

- 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. 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 spoke to the headteacher, deputy and assistant head teachers, subject leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, pupils, and special educational needs coordinator. They met with representatives from governance, including the chair of governors and five other governors. The inspector also spoke with an external consultant to discuss their work with the school.

- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also spent time in the dining hall and outside with pupils at breaktime.
- 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. Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

Inspection team

Mireille MacRaid, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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