Inspection of The Gainsborough Hillcrest Early Years Academy

Heapham Road, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire DN21 1SW

Inspection dates:	29 and 30 April 2025
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early Years	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The acting headteacher of this school is Lewis Commander. This school is part of The Hillcrest Early Years Academy. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Deborah Mitchell.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish in this lively and welcoming school. Staff know the pupils and their families well. They treat pupils with kindness and respect and, as a result, pupils do the same.

Pupils enjoy their leadership roles. Tiny trustees recognise the importance of helping others, through giving to foodbanks and planting apple trees. The reading ambassadors suggest good books to help pupils to read more.

The school has high expectations of behaviour. Pupils rise to the challenge and behave well. Pupils say that they are happy and that they feel safe in school. They play well together during social times.

Pupils understand the 'GEM powers' and how these help them to learn. For example, they know that emerald represents bouncing back and sapphire is for staying focused. Pupils know what is expected of them and work hard to be successful. Pupils achieve well. In early years, children demonstrate highly positive attitudes to their learning. Those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported effectively to access learning with their peers.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Typical comments shared with inspectors included, 'such an amazing school with lovely and caring staff who go above and beyond for the children'.

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

The school's curriculum clearly identifies the important knowledge that pupils should learn and when. The school has ensured that the planned curriculum enables pupils to build their knowledge and skills from the early years to the end of Year 2. Overall, children in early years and pupils in key stage 1 achieve well.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They check how well pupils remember their learning. Pupils revisit learning and build on what they have learned before. In most cases, activity choices are effective and support their learning. Teachers choose exciting activities, which enthuse and engage pupils. However, sometimes, these activities do not focus sufficiently on what pupils need to know and remember. When this is the case, pupils do not remember their learning as well as they could.

The school is passionate that all pupils develop a love of reading. Pupils are captivated during highly effective story times. Staff have high levels of expertise in teaching phonics. Pupils begin to learn phonics as soon as they start in Reception. They read books that match their phonics knowledge. Teachers regularly check on pupils' progress in reading to identify those who need extra help. Any pupils who require it receive effective support to help them catch up. Pupils quickly gain the knowledge and skills they need to become confident, fluent readers. Children have a strong start to their reading in early years. They enjoy story times. Early years staff support the development of children's communication and language skills well.

The school swiftly identifies the needs of children in early years and pupils with SEND. Appropriate steps to support pupils are clear. Support staff are knowledgeable about these steps and use them to help pupils to overcome challenges and to develop confidence. Teachers provide practical activities to ensure that all pupils can participate. Pupils with SEND achieve well.

Pupils are enthusiastic learners. They demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and engage well with adults. They are keen to please. Pupils who may struggle to manage their emotions receive effective support.

Attendance is a high priority for the school. Leaders are doing all that they can to ensure that pupils attend well. Attendance over time is improving. However, some groups of pupils are still persistently absent from school. This means that they miss too much of their learning and do not achieve as well as they could.

The school supports pupils' personal development well. Pupils talk with confidence about different religions and cultures. They learn how to stay safe in the community and online. Pupils understand the importance of the 'GEM powers for life', which include supporting others and being respectful. Pupils learn about the fundamental British values through assemblies. Pupils show a deep understanding of respect, including of those who are different to them. However, they do not demonstrate the same level of understanding of other British values. As a result, pupils' understanding of some aspects of life in modern Britain is not as strong as it could be.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about being part of a supportive and enthusiastic team. They appreciate the efforts that leaders make to manage staff's workload and support their well-being. Trustees know the school well. They understand their strategic role. Trustees provide support for staff and hold leaders to account well, through challenge and effective questioning.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasions, the pedagogical choices made in teaching in some subjects do not support the intended learning. When this is the case, pupils do not learn as well as they could. The school must ensure that appropriate choices are made in how best to implement the ambitious curriculums, to support pupils to know and remember more in all subjects.

- Pupils' understanding of some of the British values is not as strong as it could be. This limits their understanding of some aspects of life in modern society. The school must ensure that work around pupils' personal development promotes their understanding of all the British values.
- Some pupils are persistently absent from school. By missing out on important learning, they do not achieve as well as they could. The school should ensure that its new attendance systems fully support those pupils who require it to attend well.

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	138330
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10347532
Type of school	Infant
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	223
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Deborah Mitchell
Headteacher	Lewis Commander (Acting headteacher)
Website	www.hillcrestearlyyearsacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 October 2014, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Gainsborough Hillcrest Early years academy converted to be an academy school in July 2012. It is a single-academy trust.
- The acting headteacher has been in post since January.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- There is a before- and after-school club managed by the school.

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 (early years and/or 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.
- Inspectors held meetings with the acting headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, behaviour lead and the leader for early years.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, science and music. For each deep dive, 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. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- The lead inspector met members of the board of trustees, including the chair of trustees and the chair of members.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses and Ofsted's survey for school staff and pupils.
- An inspector spoke informally with parents outside the school.
- An inspector visited the breakfast club that pupils attend.
- 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 pupils' behaviour at various times of day, including in lessons, around the school site and at lunchtime. They scrutinised the school's records for attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

Donna Chambers, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Alison Adair	Ofsted Inspector

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