

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Highfields School

Upper Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 5NA

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 January 2025

Outcome

Highfields School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Andrew Marsh. This school is part of East Midlands Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Rob McDonough, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ann Witheford.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this welcoming school. They look forward to coming to school because of the care and dedication that staff provide. Staff model the respect they expect pupils to show. Pupils respond by being polite to and considerate of staff, and caring towards each other. There are strong relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils are known well by staff. Older students take responsibility for supporting younger pupils.

The school has high expectations for all pupils. Staff promote an environment that 'values every individual and inspires them to achieve their full potential'. Pupils rise to meet these ambitions by being inclusive of each other and working hard to achieve strong outcomes. The school is effective in developing learners that are 'responsible, resilient, reasoning, reflective and resourceful'.

The school provides for pupils' wider development well. The 'student ambassador programme' helps pupils to develop leadership skills. Many pupils benefit from the opportunity to participate in the high-quality performing arts productions.

Most parents and carers are positive about the school. One parent, summing up the views of others, said, 'There is a sense of a great level of care and passion from the staff for the well-being and development of my children.'

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

Pupils benefit from a highly aspirational and broad curriculum. The school has designed its subject curriculums to build on pupils' knowledge with consistency and precision. The school's curriculum is reviewed and refined routinely. This ensures that pupils benefit from an ambitious range of subjects and high-quality learning opportunities.

Staff are skilled and knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. Most pupils have a strong understanding of the content of the curriculum because staff present information clearly. Staff share resources, good practice and expertise from across the school. They provide pupils with a consistent approach that greatly benefits their learning. Staff make sure that activities are well matched to what pupils need to learn next. They have thought carefully about how to meet the needs of all pupils. As a result, pupils, including some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make strong progress through the curriculum. However, the school has not evaluated precisely the strategies used to support disadvantaged pupils. This means that some of this support is less effective in meeting these pupils' learning needs.

The school makes careful and purposeful checks on pupils' learning. This is seamlessly woven into lessons over time. Staff are highly skilled at using the information gained from these checks to provide pupils with timely, tailored support in lessons.

Most pupils achieve highly because they have developed the knowledge and skills that they need at each stage of their education. Students in the sixth form benefit from a strong foundation in key stages 3 and 4 to succeed as they get older. Many sixth-form students achieve highly in the qualifications they take.

A love of reading is promoted at the school. Recent initiatives to expand reading across the school have led to more reluctant readers gaining confidence to read out loud. Those who fall behind with reading are helped to catch up through effective support from specialist staff.

Pupils have highly positive attitudes to their learning and take their education seriously. They focus intently, are diligent in completing their work and move around the school sensibly. The school's high expectations of attendance are clear from the outset. It engages well with families to support them in ensuring that their children's attendance remains high.

Pupils learn about current affairs and are encouraged to discuss and debate issues related to the fundamental British values. The 'student ambassador programme' also helps pupils connect with the local community through charitable work and volunteering. Pupils enthusiastically take up the various opportunities offered to them to develop their talents and interests. Sixth-form students develop their skills as they help to lead some of the lunchtime clubs. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme helps pupils know how to stay safe, including when online. Younger pupils enjoy being taught aspects of the PSHE programme by sixth-form students. Pupils understand positive

relationships, they value difference and they respect one another. The careers provision prepares pupils well for their next steps. Vulnerable pupils are prioritised for advice and guidance. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Staff feel well supported. They appreciate the effort made to reduce their workload and improve their well-being. The actions of school and trust leaders to continually improve the school are highly effective. The trust and the school's governing body provide appropriate checks to ensure that all statutory responsibilities are fulfilled.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not identified clearly enough the intended outcomes of all the strategies that it employs to support disadvantaged pupils. This means that some support provided for disadvantaged pupils is not as precisely tailored to their needs as it could be. Some of these pupils continue to make less progress than their non-disadvantaged peers. The school should ensure that all its work to support disadvantaged pupils has the precision needed for leaders to be able to evaluate its impact and plan for further improvements effectively.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Highfields School, to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2012.

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	148299
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10347696
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,299
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	210
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ann Witheford
CEO of the trust	Rob McDonough
Headteacher	Andrew Marsh
Website	www.highfields.derbyshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the East Midlands Education Trust in October 2021. When its predecessor school, Highfields School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good for overall effectiveness. The school has experienced some significant changes in the senior leadership since that inspection.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.
- 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

- 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 met with the headteacher and other senior and curriculum leaders. The lead inspector met with the CEO and deputy CEO of the multi-academy trust, members of the board of trustees and a group of governors, including the chair.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- Inspectors observed behaviour in lessons and at other times around school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 took note of the responses received from Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and considered the results of Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

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