

Inspection of a good school: Highfield School

Gawthorpe Lane, Ossett, West Yorkshire WF5 9BS

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 November 2023

Outcome

Highfield School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Highfield School prepares pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively for adulthood. The curriculum is shaped according to the needs of pupils. It meets their social, behavioural and academic needs well. By the time pupils and students leave school, the school puts plans in place to help them to thrive in the future. Staff build pupils' life skills by helping them to cook through 'shop-cook-eat' and by developing their financial independence at the school bank.

Leaders plan for pupils' personal development particularly well. Pupils are part of the local community. They dress May Day floats, take part in interfaith week and contribute to national events, such as the Coronation. Staff weave these experiences into the life of the school. Leaders plan thoughtfully to help pupils to develop their understanding of what it is to be a citizen in Britain today.

Pupils know what it is to be kind to one another. They treat each other well. Pupils feel happy and safe. Those who struggle to behave are supported to do so, with some receiving additional help from staff in 'the hut'.

Members of staff know their pupils as individuals, understand their specific needs and plan to help them develop their knowledge well at Highfield School.

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

Pupils learn in one of four different curriculum pathways according to their needs. Where pupils' needs are primarily behavioural and social, the curriculum supports pupils' development increasingly well. Where pupils are able to learn different subjects, leaders plan well to meet both their SEND needs and to teach subject knowledge. In each pathway, leaders have thought carefully about what skills they want pupils to develop. The pathways are ambitious.

For example, in English, pupils' communication and understanding develops well across their time in school. Staff use a variety of communication tools to help pupils to express themselves. The school puts an effective programme in place for pupils who are developing their phonics awareness to help them to read.

Subject trackers break down the skills pupils need to help teachers plan individual next steps for pupils, for example in spelling, grammar and writing. This is the case in several subjects. Although the development of skills is addressed well across the curriculum, the precise subject knowledge that teachers want pupils to learn is not clearly identified. On occasion, this lack of precision creates gaps in pupils' knowledge.

The extent to which the curriculum supports pupils' personal development is impressive. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is tailored extremely well to the needs of pupils. Pupils learn how to be kind, how to keep themselves safe and how to make sensible choices. Outdoor education supports this. All pupils can practise archery and go on bike rides, regardless of physical ability. Pupils develop their social and communication skills by negotiating obstacle courses and tunnels. Leaders ensure that pupils gain a wide range of experiences, including the theatre, cinema and outdoor visits.

Leaders understand that preparing pupils for adult life is extremely important for the pupils in their care. Where possible, students in the sixth form access qualifications. Pupils across the school develop a wide range of life skills in 'the flat'. Travel training and financial awareness have a high priority. The school ensures that pupils receive appropriate careers education and guidance. Pupils and students in the sixth form leave school with clear and ambitious pathways for the future.

Pupils are taught what good behaviour looks like. Pupils strive to meet teachers' expectations in relation to how they behave towards others. The school is a calm, friendly and focused environment. Pupils attend school regularly and often.

Leaders generally take staff workload into account. Staff are committed to helping the pupils in their care.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some areas of the curriculum, the precise knowledge that the school wants pupils to learn is not clearly identified. This lack of precision can create gaps in pupils' knowledge. The school should ensure that the precise knowledge that pupils are expected to learn is clearly identified across pathways and different subjects.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2018.

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	108311
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	10289972
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	52
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Annette Netherwood
Headteacher	Rebecca Thompson
Website	www.highfield-school.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Highfield School is a special school that provides education for pupils aged 11 to 19. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The primary needs of pupils are changing over time. A greater proportion of pupils with autism and/or communication difficulties now attend school. Other pupils have severe learning difficulties.
- The school does not currently use any alternative providers.
- Some sixth-form students are based at two of the school's other campuses: City Futures (28 Westgate, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 1JY) or Futures (Penny Appeal campus, Thornes Park, Wakefield, WF2 8QZ). These focus on preparation for adulthood in addition to providing qualifications and accreditation.

- 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

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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. Meetings were also held with subject leaders and those responsible for different curriculum pathways.
- An inspector met with representatives from the local governing body and spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, communication and reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, the inspectors looked at curriculum planning, conducted joint lesson visits with leaders, had discussions with teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning where possible (including students in the sixth form), looked at pupils' books and samples of their work as recorded digitally. In addition, an inspector discussed outdoor education and visited this provision. An inspector visited both of the additional sites where some sixth formers are based.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, around the school and at lunchtime. The inspector spoke with pupils about their views of the school and their learning, behaviour and safety, where possible.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. This included comments received via the free-text facility. An inspector also talked to some parents in person. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils about their experiences at school. This included students in the sixth form.
- 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. An inspector also observed pupils' arrival into school and transport arrangements.

Inspection team

Michael Wardle, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

James Duncan

His Majesty's Inspector

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