

Harlow Fields School and College

Tendring Road, Harlow, Essex CM18 6RN

Unique reference number (URN): 131838

Focused monitoring inspection report:

15 April 2026

The inspection was carried out because concerns had been raised with Ofsted about safeguarding, leadership and governance, inclusion, teaching and attendance and behaviour.

During the focused monitoring inspection, inspectors considered the following evaluation areas:

- Safeguarding
- Leadership and governance
- Inclusion
- Curriculum and teaching
- Attendance and behaviour

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, children are made safer and feel safe.

Leadership and governance

Leadership has stabilised following the appointment new of senior leaders. This has improved leadership capacity. These leaders have been effective in making appropriate and accurate changes to the provision. They have overhauled the school's curriculum to ensure it more precisely meets the needs of pupils. Leaders have also ensured that processes for safeguarding, attendance and behaviour are robust. The school employs a number of unqualified teachers. Leaders have prioritised these staff members' professional development so that all teachers have the knowledge and skills to effectively implement the curriculum and support pupils' multiple special educational needs and/or disabilities

(SEND) needs. Leaders recognise that they still need to embed some systems and processes consistently well. They understand the need to continue to work with staff to support their wellbeing and engagement during this period of change and improvement. However, the pace of change has left some staff weary.

The improvement board have worked well with the governing body to provide effective challenge and support for leaders. Those responsible for governance understand what the school does well and the key priorities for improvement. The improvement board has challenged leaders robustly and provided clear, effective guidance, which has supported the process of improvement and strengthened leadership expertise. Leaders recognise that the rate of change has been greater in some areas than others. They have prioritised the most urgent areas for improvement. They understand the need to strengthen engagement with staff, parents and carers.

Inclusion

Leaders have ensured that staff receive appropriate and expert professional learning so that they can meet pupils' needs safely and effectively. This includes medical training so staff can safely administer procedures and medication to pupils who need it. Staff have also received additional training from therapeutic professionals to better understand pupils' complex needs. While this training has had a positive impact, leaders recognise that limited time with these professionals restricts how well staff can embed the strategies they have learned. Currently, the allocation of therapeutic support is too low to meet pupils' multiple needs. In response, leaders are developing plans to train designated therapeutic support staff in each classroom so that pupils can access the support they need when required.

Leaders ensure that pupils' communication needs are generally well supported across the school. A range of low- and high-tech communication systems and approaches are typically well embedded in practice. Where staff apply these resources consistently, pupils communicate, express their needs, make choices and engage in learning more effectively. However, leaders recognise that the use of these approaches is not yet consistent and are taking appropriate steps to address this variability.

Pupils benefit from a personalised curriculum that closely aligns to their personal learning targets. These reflect the outcomes set out in pupils' education, health and care plans. Staff understand these plans well and use them effectively to adapt learning and provision. They support pupils to make progress towards their intended outcomes.

Attendance and behaviour

Leaders have established clear processes to follow up absence to ensure pupils are safe. These include first-day calling and appropriate escalation procedures, such as home visits, when contact cannot be made. Leaders have recently introduced a framework that sets out the actions required at key threshold points. This includes additional safeguards for the most vulnerable pupils. Leaders recognise that this framework is not yet fully embedded and consistent application remains a priority. Overall, attendance aligns with published national published averages for SEND provisions. Leaders work closely with families to

support improvements in attendance. This targeted work is having a positive impact for some pupils.

Rates of severe absence are influenced by pupils' medical needs. The school makes appropriate use of alternative provision to support pupils' engagement and learning where necessary. Part-time timetables are used rarely, appropriately and in pupils' best interests. Leaders are strengthening the recording of these arrangements to ensure clear oversight.

Leaders have also improved behaviour systems over time through focused staff training in therapeutic approaches and deescalation strategies. Behaviour records indicate that restrictive practices are used appropriately and safely. Leaders maintain appropriate oversight of behaviour. Behaviour support plans are appropriate. They include a risk assessment. They provide staff with clear guidance on each pupil's triggers, strategies and interventions.

Curriculum and teaching

Leaders have undertaken a comprehensive redesign of the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of pupils effectively across all phases, including the development of the early years foundation stage curriculum. The whole school curriculum is now well aligned to pupils' individual needs and their various stages of development. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is ambitious and prepares pupils appropriately for their next steps. This includes the use of appropriate accreditation pathways at key stage 4 and key stage 5. Leaders have carefully matched these pathways to pupils' abilities and aspirations.

Typically, teaching is effective. Pupils are generally well supported to engage in their learning. Staff use a range of strategies to effectively adapt learning to meet pupils' needs. However, this is not yet consistent across all areas of the curriculum. A number of unqualified teachers are at different stages of working towards qualified teacher status. Leaders have prioritised their development through structured mentoring and access to expert training. This work is strengthening teaching knowledge and practice over time.

Leaders have established assessment approaches across the school. However, the overall approach to checks on pupils' learning is not yet fully refined. Leaders are continuing to develop assessment processes so that staff can identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge more precisely and address these consistently.

Additional next steps

Leaders and those responsible for governance should, in addition to the next steps raised at the school's last full inspection:

- Leaders should ensure that new systems and approaches, including those relating to curriculum delivery, assessment, communication strategies and attendance approaches, are embedded securely and implemented consistently well across the school.

About this inspection

This inspection was conducted under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for focused monitoring inspections.

The inspection team spoke to pupils, staff and leaders during the inspection. This included the headteacher and assistant headteachers. The lead inspector also met with representative from the local authority and the chair of the governing body.

There has been substantial change to the senior leadership team since the last inspection. This includes the appointment of 3 new assistant headteachers.

Following the last inspection, the local authority has set up an improvement and financial board to support school leaders.

The school currently makes use of 2 unregistered alternative provisions.

Lead inspector

Nina Marabese

His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector

Rowena Simmons

Ofsted Inspector

Michael Williams

His Majesty's Inspector

About this school

School capacity

205

Number of pupils on roll

212

Type of specialist provision

Moderate and severe Learning Difficulty and
Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty

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