

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

Cumberland Avenue, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6HA

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 October 2024

Outcome

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

The head of school is Vicki Hughes. This school is part of the Concordia Multi-Academy 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), Tracy Webb, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Keith. There is also an executive headteacher, Jenni Ogden, who is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are polite and thoughtful. They are proud to play their part in making sure that everyone is welcome in their school and that nobody feels left out. Pupils help to make the school a happy place to be.

Pupils are respectful to each other and to adults. Their behaviour around school is calm, safe and considerate of others. For example, pupils are keen to walk 'wonderfully' along the corridors so that they do not put others at risk. Pupils' positive conduct helps to create a calm and industrious atmosphere throughout the school.

The school wants pupils to succeed academically, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It has designed a curriculum that has raised expectations of what pupils can achieve across a broad range of subjects. Pupils typically work hard and listen attentively to their teachers and to each other. By the time that they leave the school in Year 6, pupils are well prepared for the challenges of the key stage 3 curriculum.

Pupils enjoy helping others. Those who represent their classmates as junior governors are proud of their roles. Pupils relish taking part in the clubs on offer to them. This is helping them to explore a greater range of interests than in the past.

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

The school has been through a period of considerable change since it was last inspected. This includes joining a different multi-academy trust and, more recently, the appointment of new senior leaders. Despite this, the school has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the time of the previous inspection.

Trustees and members of the local academy board know the school exceptionally well. Their insightful support and challenge make a strong contribution to the leadership of the school.

The new leadership has brought about rapid improvements to several aspects of the curriculum in a short space of time. Staff recognise that the pace of curriculum improvement has increased the demands placed upon them. That said, most staff appreciate the school's actions to support their workload. They especially welcome the opportunity to work with staff from other schools within the trust. This has helped to develop their expertise.

The school has designed well-ordered subject curriculums that support children to build their knowledge from the early years as they move into key stage 1 and beyond. Some of these are more established than others. Teachers have the expertise to deliver these curriculums well. They select appropriate activities to deepen pupils' knowledge successfully. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to revisit earlier learning. In this way, pupils build new knowledge on firm foundations and achieve well.

In a few subjects, the curriculum has been revised more recently. In these subjects, learning is not delivered as well as it is in others because teachers are still familiarising themselves with what pupils need to know. At times, some teachers do not check that pupils' understanding is secure before moving on to new learning. Added to this, when misconceptions arise, teachers are not as adept at addressing them. As a result, in these subjects, some pupils do not recall knowledge as fluently as they should.

The school's work to ensure that the individual needs of pupils with SEND are accurately identified and met is also developing. At times, this means that the support that teachers provide for these pupils is not timely or effective. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they could.

The school has put reading at the heart of the curriculum. Children in the provision for two-year-olds join in with familiar stories with gusto. They are attuned to patterns in sounds and repeat these carefully. Staff ensure that children begin to build up their phonics knowledge from the Reception Year. Staff provide prompt help for the small number of pupils with gaps in their reading knowledge. This helps pupils to build their phonics knowledge securely over time. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage of learning. They can use the phonics skills they have learned accurately when they write.

Pupils work and play together amicably. Most pupils are rarely absent from school. Pupils' strong attendance and positive attitudes towards their learning contribute well to their achievement.

The school supports pupils well in their personal development. Pupils learn how to develop safe and healthy relationships, including when they are online. They find out about people's views, lives and beliefs that might be different to their own. Pupils understand the importance of equality. They learn what it means to live in a modern and diverse society.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not deliver some aspects of the curriculum consistently well. This makes it harder for pupils to learn and recall key knowledge when they need it. The school should make sure that teachers are equipped to support pupils to build up a secure body of knowledge across the curriculum.
- In a few subjects, the school's assessment strategies are underdeveloped. This sometimes hampers teachers from identifying and addressing pupils' misconceptions and gaps in knowledge quickly enough. It also makes it more difficult for pupils to learn new information. The school should ensure that approaches to assessment in these remaining subjects support teachers to check how well pupils have learned the knowledge in the curriculum.
- The school does not make sure that the additional needs of some pupils with SEND are accurately identified. This means that some pupils with SEND struggle to access the curriculum because their teachers are unsure how best to support them. The school should equip teachers with the knowledge that they need to recognise and meet the differing needs of pupils with SEND.

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 to be 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 Community Primary School, to be good for overall effectiveness in April 2015.

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	143160
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10348345
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	243
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Keith
CEO of the trust	Tracy Webb
Headteacher	Vicki Hughes (Head of School)
Website	www.highfieldsacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 April 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- At the time of the last inspection the school was part of the Star Academy Trust. In April 2022, the school joined the Concordia Multi-Academy Trust.
- There have been several changes to the school's leadership since the school was last inspected. The head of school and executive headteacher are both new appointments.
- Since the school was last inspected it has opened provision for Nursery-aged children. This includes children who are two years of age.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision for pupils.
- The school provides a before- and after-school club for pupils.

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 her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector spoke with the executive headteacher, head of school and other leaders in the school.
- The inspector met with trustees, including the chief executive officer. She also spoke with members of the local academy board, including the co-chairs of the board.
- The inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. She also listened to pupils from Years 1 to 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- 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.
- The inspector spoke with parents and carers as they dropped their children off at school. The inspector also considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.
- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- There were no responses to the online survey for pupils. However, the inspector spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school.

Inspection team

Jackie Stillings, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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