

Inspection of Highfields Spencer Academy

Tutbury Avenue, Littleover, Derby, Derbyshire DE23 3UX

Inspection dates:	3 and 4 June 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Brooke McCulloch. This school is part of the Spencer Academies 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), Paul West, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Donna Kinderman.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school are happy and safe. The school is ambitious for all pupils to succeed and thrive. Many pupils achieve well.

The school maintains high expectations for pupils' behaviour within a positive and caring ethos. The school's 'RISE' values of 'respect, inspire, success and empathy' are promoted widely and broadly understood by most. Respectful relationships are at the heart of the school. Discrimination of any kind is not accepted. Pastoral support for pupils is strong. Families appreciate how the school provides them with valuable advice and specialist support if needed. Pupils are confident in the trusted adults they can turn to if they have any worries.

Pupils access a broad range of extra-curricular clubs to develop their wider interests. For instance, pupils can enjoy netball, football, dance and karate. Pupils value these new experiences and potential new hobbies.

The school enriches pupils' learning with varied opportunities that nurture their personal development. Popular residential visits and camping in the school grounds help to build pupils' independence and teamwork skills. Pupils' curriculum experiences are brought to life with educational visits. For example, a recent space centre visit extended pupil's scientific knowledge, and a visit to a castle supported their studies in history.

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

Children receive a positive start to their education in early years. The nurturing culture lays firm foundations for children's confidence and curiosity to flourish. Children explore the mud kitchen and water play outdoors with enthusiasm and confidence. Large climbing apparatus provides effective physical development opportunities to support children's coordination and dexterity. Staff are caring. They skilfully support children's early language. This includes conversations that sustain children's interests effectively such as encouraging appropriate communication skills when discussing familiar family photos.

Reading is prioritised. High-quality professional development ensures that staff have the skills and knowledge to teach phonics well. Staff teach early reading effectively. The routines for pupils to learn early sounds and develop fluency with reading are established. Those who need more support with early reading get the help they need with extra practise to catch-up. They achieve well.

The school has overhauled its curriculum extensively to ensure that all subjects are well sequenced in a logical order. Essential knowledge to be learned is specified clearly. The school ensures there are regular opportunities for pupils to review this important knowledge so that they remember well. The curriculum is aspirational. The school aims for pupils to make links and connections with knowledge across subjects. However, in some subjects, staff do not take sufficient account of pupils' prior understanding or knowledge. As a result, they do not build on what pupils already know and understand.

Staff present new learning to pupils with skill and precision. They use their subject knowledge well to explain new knowledge in manageable chunks. Staff ask specific questions to check pupils' understanding and address misconceptions appropriately. They use a variety of approaches to support pupils' engagement and understanding. For example, staff may facilitate focused partner discussions about new vocabulary with the aim of improving comprehension.

Staff get to know pupils very well. The needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are met with precision and care. Staff use resources effectively to help pupils with SEND to access the curriculum and achieve well.

Staff are consistent in managing pupils' behaviour well. Few reminders are needed to encourage pupils to focus their attention on study. Behaviour is calm and purposeful. Pupils are polite and play well together at social times of the day. They relish the wide variety of games and activities that they have at breaktimes to keep them busy and active. They enjoy their play.

The school has notably effective systems that ensure pupils attend school regularly. It works with families to promote the value of high attendance and its positive impact on learning. As a result, pupils' attendance is very positive and improves over time.

The school gives careful consideration to the high-quality personal development programme it provides for pupils. Pupils' safety is prioritised. Pupils benefit from a precisely constructed curriculum that teaches them effective strategies to be safe in the community and online. Pupils are prepared appropriately for life in modern Britain. They develop an awareness of discrimination and learn about the fundamental British values. They are respectful of different religions and beliefs. They develop an age-appropriate understanding of different relationships.

Governors and trustees understand their responsibilities and know the school well. As a new staff team, there is an impressive team effort that supports the school's collective ambitions and vision. Together, all at the school have accomplished tangible improvements in a short space of time. Staff appreciate the support that the school provides for their professional development and their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some aspects of the school's new curriculum do not sufficiently take account of what pupils have previously learned. Consequently, in some subjects, the curriculum content does not always build securely on pupils' prior understanding. The school should

continue to refine its new curriculum to ensure that content is well sequenced and builds progressively, enabling pupils to remember and do more over time.

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	147869
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10379598
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	231
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Donna Kinderman
CEO of the trust	Paul West
Principal	Brooke McCulloch
Website	www.highfieldsspencer.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	7 and 8 February 2023, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2020 as part of the Spencer Academies Trust. There are currently pupils in the Nursery Year up to Year 5 on roll at the school.
- Most staff have joined the school in the last two years. The senior leadership team are a new team, with the headteacher in post since June 2023.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, religious education and history. 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 considered other subjects in the curriculum and the curriculum for the early years.
- Inspectors considered the school's personal development programme, including its relationships and sex and health education offer.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and subject leaders. They spoke with leaders about the provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, around the school and at social times. They discussed behaviour and attendance with leaders.
- 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.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the board of trustees, the local governing body, senior leaders for school improvement and the CEO of the trust.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of evidence, including some documents published on the school's website.
- Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils on site. They considered the responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and the views of parents expressed through Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Donna Moulds, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Andy Lakatos

Ofsted Inspector

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