

Harwich and Dovercourt High School

Address: Hall Lane, Harwich, Essex, CO12 3TG

Unique reference number (URN): 145061

Inspection report: 6 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific 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, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

This school requires significant improvement

His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires **significant improvement** because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Needs attention

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Over time, rates of attendance for all groups of pupils at the school have been low. Despite some encouraging recent improvements, levels of absence, including for disadvantaged pupils, continues to be higher than the national average. Leaders recognise this. Alongside the trust, school leaders have established an attendance strategy to secure further improvements. The early impact of this can be seen, including where the school has worked with local partners to support individual pupils and families. However, these actions need embedding as the impact is not sustained. Too many pupils miss important learning, contributing to gaps in their knowledge.

The school has high expectations for pupils' behaviour. These are generally understood by staff and pupils. Most pupils behave well, treating one another with respect and tolerance. Staff form positive relationships with pupils, checking that they are ready to learn. Consequently, the school is typically calm and orderly. Staff address concerns, such as reports of bullying, effectively. This helps pupils to feel safe in school. Sometimes, in lessons, pupils' attitudes towards their education are not as positive as they should be. Typically, this is where teaching is less effective or when staff apply the school's expectations less consistently.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of the curriculum and teaching in school. Presently, too much variation exists in how effectively the curriculum is taught. Consequently, pupils do not receive a consistently high-quality education. Leaders have taken steps to address this. For example, the key stage 3 curriculum has been broadened, taking into account pupils' interests.

Staff receive training to enable them to teach the curriculum well. Some strategies, with support from the trust, have accelerated in recent months. This includes support for staff teaching outside of their subject specialism. Despite this, much work is in the early stages and inconsistencies remain.

Where practice is most effective, pupils make secure progress through the curriculum. However, elsewhere, teachers do not check pupils' understanding and correct misconceptions well enough. Staff do not adjust their teaching based on assessment information or to meet the needs of individual pupils consistently well. This slows pupils' progress through the curriculum.

Help for pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read has been prioritised. They are well supported by specialist trained staff. These sessions, including phonics, enable pupils to catch up and support them to access the curriculum. The school's approach to supporting those pupils who require help with their writing is underdeveloped by comparison.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

The school has effective systems in place to identify pupils' individual needs, such as special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders share information about how to meet these needs with staff. Teachers use this information inconsistently. Although sometimes teachers adjust their practice, supporting these pupils well, too often support for pupils with SEND and other disadvantaged pupils varies from one classroom to another. Staff training to strengthen this aspect of the school's work is appropriate but ongoing, with the impact of this being mixed.

The school has established various targeted approaches to support individual pupils and groups. This includes supporting those pupils at risk of exclusion to remain engaged in their learning. These initiatives are beginning to make a difference, especially for those who struggle with anxiety or attendance. Some pupils access part of their education at providers of alternative provision. These placements are carefully selected and appropriately reviewed by leaders to ensure that they are in the best interests of pupils.

The school's pupil premium strategy is appropriately considered. However, over time, it has not had the impact that leaders intend. This is particularly evident in the achievement of pupils who are disadvantaged, which has remained low.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Leaders, including the new chief executive officer of the trust and the interim executive board, have an accurate view of the school. They recognise that, historically, improvements have not been secured quickly enough. Recent steps have accelerated this but need to realise sustained impact. The trust has increased support for the school, mitigating recruitment challenges in this coastal location and increasing its capacity to make necessary changes. This support is beginning to positively impact routines and provide targeted support for pupils with barriers to their learning, for example.

Those with responsibility for governance provide increasingly effective support and challenge to school leaders, acting in the interests of pupils. They complete reviews of systems, including those for attendance, behaviour and safeguarding, to assure themselves that the school meets its statutory duties.

Families have mixed views of the school. While some are positive, others lack confidence in aspects of the school's work. Some are yet to see improvements in the day-to-day experience of their children. Leaders act on concerns raised and share information more generally with parents and carers.

Staff receive an appropriate professional development offer. Those who are new to the profession are well supported to complete their induction programmes. Leaders carefully

balance the need to make improvements with the impact of these on staff workload and wellbeing.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

The school provides pupils with a growing range of opportunities to enhance their education. This includes clubs, leadership opportunities and enrichment activities. These build pupils' confidence and extend their interests. However, the school does not monitor pupils' participation closely enough. This limits its ability to ensure that those pupils who would benefit most, including disadvantaged pupils, receive a full offer that supports their wider cultural and character development.

Pupils study personal, social and health education and relationships and sex education regularly. During these lessons, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including online. The school adjusts the curriculum, ensuring that it reflects its context and local issues. The curriculum builds progressively, enabling pupils to develop an age-appropriate understanding of important knowledge, such as the fundamental British values or how to keep healthy and safe. Some pupils learn this curriculum securely. However, others do not. As in other subjects, variation in how effectively the curriculum is taught and other factors, such as absence, result in pupils' knowledge of these topics being inconsistent.

The school provides pupils with effective pastoral care. Staff know pupils well and act in their interests. Pupils have confidence in trusted adults to listen and help them should they have any concerns. The school offers a range of additional services, such as support for pupils' mental health. These help those who face additional barriers to feel that they belong.

Pupils receive a programme of careers advice and guidance. This includes opportunities to learn about providers who they may wish to study with in the future to help pupils to make more informed decisions. Pupils can access independent one-to-one advice. This advice helps to provide pupils with the information they need to make these important decisions with confidence.

Urgent improvement

Achievement

Urgent improvement 

The achievement of pupils in GCSE examinations is low, including in English and mathematics where results have declined and are notably below national averages. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils whose attainment is below that of their peers nationally. The gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers is widening. Although leaders have taken steps to resolve this, current pupils continue to achieve less well than they should.

Pupils' knowledge of the curriculum in many subjects remains insecure. Too many produce work that is not of a high quality, reflecting the limited impact of the curriculum over time. Although pupils' reading knowledge is improving, standards of written work, particularly for some boys and disadvantaged pupils, are particularly variable. As a result, many pupils are

not as well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training as they should be.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils experience a mixed quality of education. Where teaching is clear and effective checks are made on pupils' understanding, pupils enjoy learning and acquire knowledge well. However, variability in the effectiveness of the school's curriculum and teaching means that this is not always the case. Disadvantaged pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not consistently receive support that meets their needs. In many lessons, teachers do not identify gaps in these pupils' knowledge, and lessons are not adapted effectively. As a result, pupils do not achieve well.

On arrival to school, pupils are met by approachable adults who greet them and check that they are ready to learn. Staff know pupils well and take a genuine interest in them. This helps pupils feel welcome and sets a calm tone for each day. Around the site, pupils usually move sensibly and understand the importance of tolerance and respect. This helps prepare them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils say that staff listen and act when worries, including bullying, arise. Pupils feel safe and know who to turn to if they need help, including from the effective pastoral support team.

Leaders have strengthened routines for attendance. Staff make first day calls and home visits, and families recognise this effort. Even so, too many pupils continue to miss school too often. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND. This further limits their learning and their achievement.

Pupils experience behaviour around the school that is generally calm. Serious disruption is rare, but in some lessons pupils' attitudes toward their learning are not always positive. This is often when expectations are not applied consistently or when teaching is less effective. Pupils appreciate the school's clubs, safe spaces, and the targeted help on offer to support their wellbeing. Pupils take on leadership roles and value the trips on offer. However, leaders do not track participation closely enough to make sure vulnerable pupils are routinely involved.

Next steps

- Leaders, including the trust, should ensure that pupils' achievement in national assessments improves, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, so that all pupils are well-prepared for their next stage in education or training.
- Leaders should ensure that staff training translates into consistently effective teaching of the curriculum, reducing variation, so that pupils achieve well across the school.
- Leaders should ensure that the strategies identified to support pupils with barriers to their learning, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are implemented consistently well by all staff.

- Leaders should ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills, including for those pupils who require support with their writing, are closed rapidly so that pupils can progress securely through the curriculum in all subjects.
 - Leaders, including the trust, should ensure that rigorous monitoring and evaluation enables the school to identify how well recent improvement initiatives are working and to adjust these to secure stronger impact, as required.
 - Leaders should refine and embed the school's attendance strategy to secure sustained reductions in the absence of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.
 - Leaders should strengthen the school's tracking of pupils' participation in personal development activities to enable pupils who would benefit from further opportunities to be identified and included effectively.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Sigma Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Fiona Pierson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sue Hammond.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the chair of trustees, those responsible for governance, the chief executive officer (CEO), the headteacher and other appropriate staff during the inspection.

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.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of alternative provisions, including 9 unregistered settings.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. This has included the setting up of an interim executive board (IEB) to assume responsibility for governance and the recent appointment of a trust CEO.

The school's sixth form provision has closed since the time of the previous inspection in September 2021. Although the school is registered to take pupils between the ages of 11 and 18, all pupils who currently attend the school are aged between 11 and 16.

Lead inspector:

James Chester, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspectors:

Andrew Robinson, Ofsted Inspector

Wayne Jarvis, Ofsted Inspector

Andrew Hemmings, Ofsted Inspector

Michael Skelly, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 6 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,091

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,300

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

42.50%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.12%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

18.52%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	27.4%	45.2%	Below
2023/24 (final)	34.1%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	20.7%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	37.5	45.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	39.3	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	36.2	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.67	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.68	-0.03	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	12.7%	25.6%	Below
2023/24 (final)	21.4%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	10.1%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	29.5	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	30.5	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	30.5	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.11	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.00	-0.57	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	12.7%	52.8%	-40.2 pp
2023/24 (final)	21.4%	53.1%	-31.7 pp
2022/23 (final)	10.1%	52.4%	-42.3 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	29.5	50.3	-20.8

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	30.5	50.0	-19.6
2022/23 (final)	30.5	50.3	-19.8

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.11	0.16	-1.27
2022/23 (final)	-1.00	0.17	-1.17

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	86%	91%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	86%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	87%	94%	Below

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	20.00	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	19.66	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	22.96	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-1.0	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	-0.8	0.0	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	10.6%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	10.0%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	10.0%	9.0%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	32.0%	21.9%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	31.8%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	32.1%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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