

Inspection of The Folkestone School for Girls

Coolinge Lane, Folkestone, Kent CT20 3RB

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 April 2024

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

The principal of this school is Mark Lester. This school is part of The Folkestone School for Girls Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Dawn Curzon.

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 11 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils stand '10 feet tall' in this school because they learn to believe in themselves. An extensive range of opportunities develop pupils' many skills and talents such as abseiling and mountain biking. Many pupils join the cadets or Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, learning about self-defence, orienteering and survival skills. Pupils act as 'global citizens', collaborating on learning projects with schools in Nepal and France. Pupils seize every opportunity, enabling them to develop into articulate and confident young women.

Pupils behave exceptionally well here because staff have clear expectations of pupils' conduct and effort. School is a place for pupils to think in a scholarly way. They achieve well in many subjects. Pupils rise to the high levels of challenge in most lessons. An extensive careers programme prepares pupils ambitiously for the next stages of education or employment. Students in the sixth form speak highly of the excellent work the school does to prepare students for independent living. Workshops on meal preparation on a budget and finance management help students learn valuable life skills.

Pupils feel well cared for by nurturing staff. Those who need additional help to manage their feelings receive sensitive support in 'The Loft' and from the extensive pastoral and well-being team.

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

The school has constructed an impressive curriculum which provides pupils with a rich set of learning experiences. These opportunities help pupils put their learning into practice. For example, in science, pupils use their enquiry knowledge to conduct their own research based on their own areas of scientific interest. An increasing number of pupils study a GCSE in a modern foreign language. This links to the work the school has undertaken to be an 'international school' with links to other classrooms in countries across the world. Consequently, an increasing number of pupils are now studying the English Baccalaureate.

In most subjects, the curriculum identifies the ambitious knowledge and skills that pupils need to become increasingly expert. In these subjects, teachers design learning to help pupils connect ideas together. The curriculum design in the sixth form is meticulous in every subject. Sixth-form students make exceptional progress, enabling them to gain places in prestigious universities or apprenticeships. The school recognises that the curriculum in mathematics is not yet designed in a way that develops pupils' mathematical fluency, particularly in key stage 3. This limits how well pupils secure an understanding of fundamental mathematical concepts, and has impacted on how well some pupils achieve at the end of key stage 4. The school is in its early stages of reviewing the curriculum to address this issue.

The school has developed its own 'FSGBacc', which provides pupils with wider opportunities to learn a broad set of skills. Much of this work weaves into the

academic curriculum, helping pupils to apply what they know to real-world situations. The school places a strong emphasis on pupils' literacy and oracy. Pupils learn a rich range of technical vocabulary, which they use to debate and communicate with eloquence. Pupils publish their own books, host radio shows on the school radio station and visit local primary schools to help primary pupils learn languages. All pupils benefit enormously from these opportunities, including students in the sixth form.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive thoughtful support to help them learn well. Staff review detailed plans regularly to ensure that support effectively meets pupils' needs. Pupils who need help to manage their social, emotional and mental health receive sensitive support to help them improve attendance to school. The school is tenacious in its work to promote good attendance for disadvantaged pupils. Effective interventions such as bush-craft and mentoring develop pupils' confidence and resilience. Consequently, most pupils attend school very well.

Warm, nurturing relationships between staff and pupils build on a culture of mutual respect. Pupils speak so highly of the time and care that staff dedicate to seeing pupils flourish. Plentiful opportunities to engage with student leadership mean that pupils make a tangible contribution to school life. They listen intently as students in the sixth form deliver powerful assemblies to educate peers about sensitive subjects such as genocide. Pupils are incredibly mature and embrace every opportunity made available to them. Pupils feel spoilt for choice from the enormous range of clubs and trips on offer. The school is outstanding in the way it provides additional support to disadvantaged pupils to enable everyone to benefit from this rich offer.

The school has a clear vision to see every pupil succeed in life. Staff receive purposeful training to prepare them to provide a high-quality education. Currently, governance arrangements do not always effectively check how well the school is using plans to make improvements to the academic curriculum. Trustees recognise the need to review this to ensure that pupils excel in all aspects of their education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Most trustees are new and do not yet have suitable expertise or training. This means trustees are not providing appropriate challenge to ensure the school continues to move forward in its school improvement journey. Trustees must ensure that they have training to enable them to be clear on their roles and responsibilities so they can ensure that the school is taking effective action where needed.

- The school's ambition for a knowledge-rich curriculum in mathematics is not realised. This means that pupils are not learning as well as they could. The school should review the mathematics curriculum to ensure that knowledge and skills build in a systematic way to help pupils to know and remember 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	137837
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10296371
Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,160
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	290
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Dawn Curzon
Principal	Mark Lester
Website	www.folkestonegirls.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 and 11 October 2012

Information about this school

- This school is a single academy trust.
- The school uses two registered providers of alternative provision for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector also met with the representatives from the board of trustees including the chair of trustees.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, physical education, art and design, and geography. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at other aspects of the school's curriculum including modern foreign languages.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff survey and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- Inspectors reviewed and scrutinised a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' plans for improving the school, minutes of trustee meetings and visits, and records of attendance and behaviour incidents.

Inspection team

Michelle Payne, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Tash Hurtado	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Baker	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Potten	Ofsted Inspector
Harry Kutty	Ofsted Inspector

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