

Inspection of Highworth Grammar School

Maidstone Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 8UD

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 January 2025

The quality of education **Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Outstanding**

Sixth-form provision **Outstanding**

Previous inspection grade Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Duncan Beer. This school is the only school in the Highworth Grammar School Trust. Other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Amer Khalil.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since June 2013.

What is it like to attend this school?

A culture of academic excellence, underpinned by nurturing care, enables pupils to thrive in this exceptional school. Pupils are immensely proud of the outstanding academic and personal achievements they make. They consistently rise to the high expectations that all staff have of them. During their time at school, pupils acquire an extensive rich range of skills and knowledge that prepares them well for life.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective help from staff that know them very well. Students joining the sixth form receive a welcoming induction to school life. This support enables students to embody the respectful ethos the school exudes. Pupils feel very safe in school because staff expertly address any worries that arise. The school successfully educates pupils to respect differences and celebrate commonalities. A number of societies such as the 'Afro-Caribbean society' enables pupils from all backgrounds to gain a deep understanding of culture and heritage.

The school is exemplary in the way it empowers pupil voice. Student governors provide respectful challenge and influence important decisions about their education. Pupils benefit from meaningful peer mentorship. Sixth-form students provide academic support for younger pupils to help them catch up with their learning.

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

The ambitious curriculum is meticulously designed to enable pupils to achieve high levels of academic success. Across the different key stages, the curriculum builds in complexity towards ambitious aims. Teachers design lessons to help pupils regularly practise recall of essential knowledge. This develops pupils' ability to think quickly, applying what they know with impressive agility. Pupils routinely debate ideas in a scholarly and informed way. Teachers have high expectations in lessons. They insist pupils use accurate and ambitious vocabulary in their work. Using probing questions, teachers expertly elicit pupils' thinking and check for gaps in understanding. Gaps in learning are swiftly addressed through precise and clear feedback. Consequently, pupils and sixth-form students achieve exceptionally well.

Disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND, also achieve very well. The school forensically monitors the impact of the support for pupils who need it. Additional help is swiftly put in place if pupils struggle to achieve in line with aspirational outcomes. Thoughtful support in the 'SEND suite' enables pupils to regulate their feelings and prepare them for learning. The school routinely identifies pupils who need help to read with confidence. Targeted reading support develops pupils' fluency and reading confidence. A large proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. This regular support particularly benefits them.

The school's approach to pupils' wider development lives up to the school's motto of 'Reach for the Stars'. Students in the sixth form enthuse about the thought-provoking seminar programme. It enhances their understanding of current affairs, increasing their awareness of life in modern Britain. The school partners with other international schools.

They form pupil exchanges that enrich pupils' understanding of being a global citizen. Opportunities to take part in clubs and trips are abundant. The school prioritises help for disadvantaged pupils to remove financial barriers to participation. During lessons and mentor time, pupils learn to debate ideas in considered ways. Clubs such as 'model United Nations', debate clubs and law societies enable pupils to grapple with important global issues. The school council and student ambassadors effectively influence positive changes in school, for example organising 'focus days' and charity work. The school is exemplary in the way it enables pupils to articulate themselves in a mature and insightful way.

Careers education threads through the academic curriculum, providing insights to inspirational careers. Unbiased guidance ensures that pupils are fully informed of the numerous pathways open to them when they leave school. Students in the sixth form receive advice and mentoring to help make successful university applications. The school regularly reviews the careers offer to ensure this education is reflective of pupils' aspirations.

Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. Staff have fair and consistent high expectations. Pupils demonstrate responsibility for their own actions. They attend lessons on time, motivated to succeed. Staff provide responsive and effective support to remove barriers to positive attendance. Consequently, there have been significant improvements in whole-school attendance.

Leadership at all levels tenaciously seek ways to improve and refine the school's work. Trustees know the school very well. They provide rigorous but supportive challenge to ensure the school provides a highly effective education. The school is outward facing, collaborating with local schools to share expertise. Staff are immensely proud of the wonderfully inclusive culture that enables pupils to flourish.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	136379
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10341669
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	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1536
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	448
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Amer Khalil
Headteacher	Duncan Beer
Website	www.highworth.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 June 2013 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is a single academy trust.
- The school does not make use of any providers of alternative provision.
- 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. 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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The lead inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has 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. These trustees are referred to as governors in this school.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, art and design and history. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils’ work. Inspectors also considered other subjects.
- 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.
- Inspectors reviewed and scrutinised a range of the school’s documentation, including leaders’ plans for improving the school, minutes of governing body meetings and records of attendance and behaviour incidents.
- 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.

Inspection team

Marian Feeley, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Christie Ransom	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Fry	Ofsted Inspector
Tom Neave	Ofsted Inspector
Michelle Payne	His Majesty’s Inspector

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