

Inspection of The Hills Academy

Stancliffe Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK41 9AT

Inspection dates: 5–6 February 2020

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils behave well in lessons and when moving around the school. They enjoy sharing ideas and working things out together. Pupils told us: 'We are all here to help each other.' Teachers' high expectations ensure that most pupils work hard and do not disturb others during learning time.

A range of different clubs, such as tennis, recorders and debating, help pupils to develop as confident individuals. Leaders make sure that almost all pupils learn to swim. Many pupils learn how to play a musical instrument. Pupils recognise that visits to places like Bletchley Park and residential trips to Norfolk and France enrich their learning. Pupils appreciate and understand the responsibility of roles such as being a school councillor or sharing books with younger children. Pupils enjoy helping with the smooth running of the school.

Leaders take great care to support pupils' emotional well-being. Pupils say that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that staff will sort out any issues. Staff and pupils show a high level of respect for one another.

Parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and those who spoke with us are very supportive of the school.

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

Leaders and staff want all pupils to achieve well. In most subjects, for example mathematics, computing, physical education (PE) and personal, social and health education (PSHE), leaders have designed a well-planned and ambitious curriculum. Where this is the case, teachers plan lessons that successfully build on what pupils have learned before. Pupils' work in books shows logical sequencing in what they know and can do. This supports the good progress they make in most subjects.

In some other subjects, pupils' long-term learning is not as secure. Pupils do not make connections between what they have learned and what they need to know to learn more. For example, in history, pupils do not remember the historical eras they have studied. In geography, they cannot recall the physical features they discussed in previous lessons. Leaders are aware that the curriculum plans in some subjects need reworking so that teachers understand the important knowledge and skills pupils should learn and remember over time.

Leaders have not made sure that all curriculum leaders have the confidence or know-how to develop long-term plans in their subjects. In some areas of the curriculum, the key knowledge and skills pupils need to learn from early years through to Year 6 are not well connected. In some subjects, teaching is disjointed and, consequently, pupils have gaps in their learning.

Leaders have prioritised reading. Pupils learn phonics in a structured way that helps them learn to read confidently. Teachers are clear about the sounds and words

pupils should be able to read by the end of each term. Any pupil who is falling behind gets the right support to help them catch up quickly.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are strong. Almost all pupils are keen to learn. Disruption in class is rare because pupils want to do their best for their teachers and for themselves.

Leaders make sure that staff know how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers and teaching assistants provide a well-considered range of equipment and approaches that help pupils to learn.

Children in the Nursery and Reception classes settle happily into school and are kept safe. The classrooms and the outside area are attractively set out to encourage children to learn across the curriculum. Staff make sure that children develop their early reading and mathematics skills through lots of different activities. For example, we saw staff showing how to count down from ten as children played hide and seek. Staff supported children to use positional language correctly to guess where the hidden child might be, such as 'behind', 'under' and 'by the side'.

Leaders and staff ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils visit places of worship to learn about different religions and cultures. Pupils told us that the school is a friendly and welcoming place, where 'no one is left out because they are different'.

The governing body is effective. Governors are knowledgeable and hold leaders to account in most areas of the school's work. Staff told us that leaders are very considerate of their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture of safeguarding is consistent with the school's caring ethos. Staff receive regular training and updates. They are vigilant and understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Staff identify pupils who may be at risk and take appropriate action when required. Leaders follow up safeguarding concerns rigorously. They work effectively with other agencies and families to support pupils who may need help.

Leaders check that staff are suitable to work with children. Governors must ensure that these checks always meet statutory requirements.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. Pupils understand how to stay safe when online and when crossing roads.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is not yet coherently planned and well sequenced in some subjects. Leaders are in the process of addressing this. They have already taken steps to improve the school's curriculum and train staff. Leaders need to make sure that revised plans are successfully implemented so that teachers have clear oversight of all subjects and teach pupils effectively, in order that pupils learn well.
- Currently, in some subjects, teaching is disconnected. Pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding, which does not help them to deepen their learning. Senior leaders need to train and support curriculum leaders, some of whom are new to the role, to be well equipped to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in the subjects they lead.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	139522
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10121496
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	432
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Nicci Henson
Headteacher	Moya Whitehead
Website	www.thehillsacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- In April 2013, the school converted to a stand-alone academy. The board of trustees, known as the governing body, is the accountable body.
- In September 2017, the school became a primary school. This followed the extension of the former Hills Lower School to include Year 5 and Year 6. The primary school was established on the former lower-school site. The buildings were extended and refurbished to accommodate the additional pupil numbers.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

- As part of this inspection, we held meetings with the headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding leader, the deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), and the two assistant headteachers, one of whom is the early years leader. We also met with the English, mathematics, and history leaders, the school business manager and a group of staff, including newly qualified teachers, to discuss the impact of the support they receive from leaders.

- I met with the chair of the governing body and four other governors. Additionally, I had a telephone conversation with an external consultant to discuss their work with the school.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, writing, mathematics and history. We spoke to curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with teachers and pupils. We also observed some pupils reading to staff and talked to pupils about their reading habits.
- We also scrutinised curriculum plans and visited lessons in PSHE, PE, geography and computing.
- We spoke to pupils informally in class and around the school at breaktimes to seek their views about the school.
- We scrutinised the school's website and a range of school documents, including the school's own evaluation, improvement plans and records about behaviour, attendance and safeguarding children.
- We considered the 80 responses made by parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and emails received from parents. We also spoke to some parents at the start of the school day. Additionally, we took account of the school's own recent parent and pupil surveys.
- The transition arrangements for quality of education apply to this inspection.

Inspection team

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