

Inspection of a good school: Highfield Ely Academy

Downham Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB6 1BD

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 May 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Mr Adam Daw. This school is part of The Active Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lynsey Holzer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Claire Heald.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Highfield Ely Academy love coming to school. This starts from the moment they arrive in the morning, when staff greet them with a warm welcome. Staff have an excellent understanding of pupils' varied and complex needs. They care for pupils exceptionally well. Consequently, pupils happily settle into school. They are safe and secure in the stimulating learning environment.

Pupils benefit from a broad and engaging curriculum which meets their varied needs. This enables them to flourish as individuals and enhances their lives. The focus on communication ensures that pupils can communicate and express themselves. This gives them a 'voice' when they may not previously have had one.

Lessons are purposeful and engaging because staff know what motivates pupils. This ensures that pupils engage well in their learning. Pupils learn to recognise when they are getting upset or becoming unsettled. When this happens, staff provide highly effective support. This helps pupils to be successful.

A wide variety of carefully planned additional experiences complement pupils' learning in the classroom. The school brings learning to life through opportunities such as their adapted Duke of Edinburgh's Award, the Duchess of Ely Award, or the chance to work on their own farm. Pupils enjoy and benefit from this wide-ranging offer.

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

The school has designed and implemented a well-sequenced and highly ambitious curriculum which supports pupils with complex needs exceptionally well. The school regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the curriculum. They then make the necessary adaptations to meet the varied and changing needs of pupils.

From the early years through to the upper years, the separate areas of the curriculum contain the knowledge that pupils need. This knowledge is broken down into small, achievable steps. These steps are aligned with pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders use effective checks to ensure that the curriculum constantly matches the pupils needs.

The school ensures that staff have a secure understanding of the specific needs of pupils as detailed in their education, health and care (EHC) plans. This enables staff to expertly develop pupils' knowledge. This helps pupils to improve academically and develop important life skills.

The school prioritises reading and communication. The phonics programme enhances the reading curriculum. Adults are highly skilled in teaching phonics. Pupils love the structure that ensures their success. Those who can read do so fluently and with confidence. Some pupils use devices to help them to talk. This has vastly improved their ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Teachers read to pupils regularly. Staff use accessible and interesting books and stories. As a result, pupils achieve highly in their reading. This includes those who cannot read aloud. All classes use the library, which has a variety of books for all abilities and interests.

Lessons are calm. Pupils focus, with support, if necessary, on their class and individual learning. Pupils can talk about the improvements they have made in all areas of their learning. They are proud of their achievements. Pupils understand how staff help them to do this.

Pupils understand that although bullying and unkind behaviour can happen, the staff who care for them deal with it quickly. Staff know the most successful approaches to use to help pupils with their emotions and behaviour needs. They quickly spot signs that pupils may be struggling. Staff treat pupils with patience and respect. As a result, pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons.

Pupils' attendance is exemplary. Leaders do all they can to improve pupils' attendance despite the adversity some pupils face. The effective work the school does with parents supports this.

The personal, social, health and economic education, which includes careers, is at the heart of what the school does. It instils the school values of 'equity, respect, perseverance, kindness and compassion'. This ensures that pupils can learn to make safe and responsible decisions. The curriculum topics are adapted to pupils' age and

understanding. This contributes to pupils being able to live safe, happy lives, which prepares them for their next steps.

Those responsible for governance support the school well. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained to work in the best interests of pupils. Staff benefit from the extensive training they get. Thoughtful, regularly reviewed processes do not add to staff workload. This enables staff to concentrate on what makes the greatest difference to pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Highfield Special School, to be good in October 2014.

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 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	143111
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10323771
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Lorna Robinson
Headteacher	Adam Daw
Website	www.highfieldschoolely.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The previous head of school is now the headteacher.
- Since the previous inspection, the CEO of the Active Learning Trust has changed.
- All pupils at the school have an EHC plan.
- The school provides specialist education for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, behaviour needs and autism. Some pupils have multiple needs.
- Many pupils join the school at different points in their school life.
- The school uses the services of two unregistered alternative providers of education.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection 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 the headteacher, the assistant headteacher and other middle leaders throughout the inspection. They also met with a range of staff, including the support staff and administration staff.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's single central record and met with the designated leader for safeguarding.
- Due to the nature of the school and the specialist curriculum, inspectors carried out deep dives in the following areas: reading with communication, physical movement and physical education, and personal, social, health and economic education. In each area, inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at evidence of pupils' work.
- Additionally, the lead inspector spoke to a group of pupils about school life and spoke to individual pupils over the two days. An appropriate adult was present.
- The lead inspector considered other subject areas of the curriculum, visited a range of activities and lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised EHC plans across a range of ages and pathways and considered the impact of the work that the school does.
- The lead inspector met with the trust lead for SENDV (SEND, Inclusion and Vulnerable) pupils, representatives of the governing body, including the chair, representatives of the trust, including the CEO, and held a telephone conversation with one of the alternative providers of education.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; considered 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 considered the responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including free text comments. The lead inspector spoke to a range of parents and considered the responses from the Ofsted staff survey.

Inspection team

Suzanne Thrower, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Clare Gammons

Ofsted Inspector

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