Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Upper Shirley High School

Bellemoor Road, Upper Shirley, Southampton, Hampshire SO15 7QU

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 January 2025

Outcome

Upper Shirley High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Christopher Sykes. This school is part of Hamwic Education Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Robert Farmer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gary Plummer.

What is it like to attend this school?

The last two years have seen many improvements for pupils at Upper Shirley High (USH), in their learning and in their wider curriculum. Many parents and carers have noticed this. One accurately described it as 'a reset in standards and expectations'.

The school's values – believe, respect and succeed – are signposted everywhere, but are also seen in the way staff and pupils treat each other. Relationships are very positive. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. Bullying is increasingly rare and gets dealt with effectively. The school demands good conduct and most pupils behave extremely well. Staff work hard to correct and support the few pupils who need extra help with this.

The school provides many opportunities to excel. It sets high academic standards and most pupils achieve well, including in national examinations. Teachers constantly seek ways to improve how they deliver the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Outside the classroom, pupils take part in a wide variety of clubs and other activities. Many volunteer to take on extra responsibility through the school's programme for pupil leadership. In doing this, they become more confident and learn valuable life skills.

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

The school has an ambitious curriculum in place which sets out clearly what and how pupils will learn. Pupils study a broad curriculum with a wide choice of subjects at both key stages. More pupils now take modern foreign languages and challenging qualifications in science. Higher numbers enter subjects within the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), although the school is not yet meeting the government's national ambition for EBacc entry.

Leaders consider staff workload carefully when introducing new strategies. The multi-academy trust and the local governing committee provide expert help and sound advice. Improvement plans target the areas of greatest need. Teacher training is relevant and useful. Staff feel valued and, consequently, they show a similar care for their pupils. This is a tight-knit community with strong values, and pupils are proud of their school.

Subject content is taught in a logical way. Topics are well planned so that new learning builds on earlier knowledge. For example, in photography, pupils learn useful techniques before studying the work of a particular photographer, so they know what to look out for. In modern foreign languages, pupils learn the present tense in Year 7 so that they can use it to form more complicated tenses in later years.

Teachers are experts in their subject. They present information well. They give their pupils accurate 'in the moment' feedback as they go along, to reduce any possible misconceptions. Pupils with SEND get well-tailored support to identify and meet their learning needs.

The school has introduced strong strategies to help pupils produce high-quality work through clear, step-by-step guidance. However, these strategies are not implemented consistently well. When this happens, some pupils do not develop secure knowledge or fluency and this affects the quality of their learning.

Reading has a high profile. Pupils are encouraged to read together and on their own. They get rewards such as 'word millionaire' badges to celebrate their achievements. Teachers highlight any new words in their subjects so that pupils can remember them better. Pupils who have fallen behind with their reading get specialist help to catch up. Many, although not all, achieve well in reading.

Pupils' attendance is regular and above national averages. Some disadvantaged pupils attended less well in the past, and their learning suffered. However, this is now improving due to tireless efforts by staff. Many disadvantaged pupils now attend more often and, as a result, learn more of the curriculum.

Personal, social and health education is well organised. It helps pupils to respect diversity and cultural differences. Pupils from different backgrounds work with staff to lead clubs for their peers. This helps them develop resilience and communication skills. One pupil summed up the benefits of this, saying, 'This school brings out the best in you.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes, strategies to help pupils master key concepts and techniques are not implemented consistently well. When this happens, the quality of pupils' work is less strong. It affects how well some pupils learn and remember important knowledge. Where this is the case, the school should ensure that its strategies are applied consistently to ensure that pupils' knowledge and understanding develop securely over time.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in October 2019.

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	137037
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	10361663
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,084
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gary Plummer
CEO of the trust	Robert Farmer
Headteacher	Christopher Sykes
Website	www.uppershirleyhigh.org
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of Hamwic Education Trust.
- The current headteacher has been in post since September 2022.
- The school uses two registered alternative provisions for a few pupils.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

- 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. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with trustees and met senior trust officers, the chair of the local governing committee and members of the school's senior leadership team. The lead inspector also spoke with the alternative provisions.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with a small group of other school staff. They read every response to Ofsted's surveys for parents, staff and pupils. The lead inspector scrutinised the school's website, other school documents and read a range of publicly available information about the school.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils and observed behaviour around the school at breaktimes.
- 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.

Inspection team

Keith Pailthorpe, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Dave Euridge	Ofsted Inspector

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