

Hitchin Boys' School

Grammar School Walk, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1JB

Inspection dates

26–27 January 2016

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding academy

- The academy's motto, 'striving for excellence', is reflected strongly in all aspects of school life. Pupils thrive because personal development and academic excellence are promoted equally well.
- The positive and purposeful culture of the academy characterises the work of both staff and pupils. This is underpinned by a highly effective headteacher and governing body who enjoy strong support from parents and carers.
- Senior and middle leaders work cohesively and conscientiously to support the academy's continuous improvement. Their expertise and different responsibilities combine very well.
- The governing body is very well informed about the work of the academy. Its commitment and challenge contribute to leaders' effectiveness. Governors review their own performance and that of the academy regularly and rigorously.
- Teaching is strong across the academy. Teachers' passion for their subject is palpable. This contributes to learning that intrigues and interests pupils right from the start of lessons. Whilst staff are rightly proud of their work, they value feedback and opportunities to share ideas.
- Pupils benefit from the challenging activities that teachers prepare. These, together with probing questions and constructive advice, contribute to high achievement by pupils. This includes the most-able pupils, who excel at the academy.
- Support provided for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs meets their requirements extremely well. Teachers are given first-rate guidance based on detailed analysis of different pupils' needs.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They make a significant contribution to helping others feel safe and supported. Their growth in confidence and charisma contributes to their strong employability skills. Attendance is very high.
- Pupils make excellent progress across a wide range of subjects. They reach high standards. Academic, creative and sporting achievements give pupils a strong foundation for continuing education, employment and enjoyment.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is improving rapidly. Academy leaders make judicious use of extra funding designed to help different groups of pupils catch up.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a high priority. Exceptionally high levels of participation in extra-curricular and charitable activities show how successfully policies are reflected in practice.
- The sixth form is skilfully led and managed. Learners make excellent progress from a wide range of starting points. Comprehensive careers advice contributes to learners taking 16–19 study programmes that are very well suited to their needs.

Full report

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Develop further the use of self-reflection by pupils and staff, so that they are able to refine their work continuously, maximising opportunities between feedback sessions.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher and his senior leaders work cohesively to promote strong personal development and high academic achievement. Significant improvements in the leadership of special educational needs since the last inspection have contributed to highly effective provision for pupils, whatever their starting points. Staff, pupils and parents are extremely proud of the academy and value the strong leadership.
- Leadership at all levels is very well promoted. The academy's subject leaders inspire their staff through highly effective teaching and planning for the development of their subject. Their networking with local schools and through national initiatives ensures that their teams are very well informed. Their work strikes an excellent balance between knowing how to attain high test and examination results and promoting enjoyment in teaching and learning. This reflects clearly senior leaders' vision for a well-rounded education.
- Pastoral leaders ensure that pupils' personal development, including their behaviour and welfare, contributes positively to their growth in confidence as learners. The academy's work to develop pupils' leadership skills is highly effective. This is reflected in the respect shown by younger pupils for older pupils: for example, younger pupils stand up when a sixth former enters the classroom. This respect is hard earned through the support and guidance older pupils provide and their prominence in managing events.
- A purposeful start to every school day ensures that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is embedded. For example, assemblies and form periods actively engage pupils in current issues. Before lessons begin, pupils have already exercised their minds and organised their resources for the day. This use of time, reorganised with the strong support of the leadership team, promotes positive attitudes.
- Teachers value the wide range of evidence used to give feedback on their teaching. This includes systematic reviews of departments by senior and middle leaders and teams of staff working together to provide critical insight into each other's work. Staff meetings that share good practice are weekly. Indicative of the value teachers place on professional discourse is the sought-after prize in the staff room to win a day observing others when senior staff take their class. Leaders promote aspirational teaching.
- The leadership of teaching benefits from the academy's extensive involvement in teacher training. This contributes to the recruitment of high-quality teachers to the academy and local area. The involvement of middle leaders adds to their leadership development and strengthens their external links.
- Senior and middle leaders have a very accurate view of strengths and weaknesses across the academy. All lessons jointly observed with inspectors were consistent. Monitoring is comprehensive and ensures that teachers receive feedback on their effectiveness at teaching different groups of pupils. Recent visits by 64 members of staff to observe teaching in 45 different primary schools have enabled staff to reflect on and adjust their expectations of Year 7 pupils. However, self-reflection is under-used in between the times that staff receive feedback.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant. This enables pupils to make very well-informed choices, supported by strong careers advice and work experience for all. The range and quality of courses, including personal, social and health education, prepare pupils very well for the next stage of their life and learning. Enrichment through visits and visitors is common. In the past year, this included 14 residential experiences and 20 day visits involving over half the pupils. The range and quality of extra-curricular activities are reflected in extremely high levels of participation. For example, there are 90 boys in the school choir, 250 learning a musical instrument and over 500 involved in after-school sports.
- Resources are used judiciously to give pupils an equal opportunity to succeed. For example, additional funding is used effectively to help pupils who are behind in their literacy or mathematics when they transfer to Year 7. Until this year, disadvantaged pupils did less well than their peers. However, more tailored support for these pupils is helping them to catch up, or in some cases outperform, other pupils.
- The school community is a model of British values such as respect, tolerance and democracy. Pupils are given plentiful opportunities to explore their own ideas and identity within the context of the wider world. Their extensive charitable work and links with schools in less advantaged settings and countries contribute to pupils' care and compassion.

■ The governance of the school

- The governing body provides a high level of support and challenge to academy leaders. Governors' and leaders' ambitions for the academy are equally high. Their vision for the academy is in unison.

- Governors’ frequent visits to the academy, recorded in detail, provide a wide range of examples to question leaders about, or to celebrate with, the school community.
- The expertise of governors is deployed very effectively to strengthen the strategic direction of the academy. For example, a speech and language specialist is linked to special educational needs, and the sixth form benefits from a link governor with experience of further and higher education.
- The governing body reviews all academy policies annually. It ensures that policies are up to date, comprehensive, well informed and accessible to pupils, parents and carers.
- Governors scrutinise the arrangements for the management of teachers’ performance systematically. They ensure that the work of leaders and teachers directly reflects the academy’s plans for improvement.
- The governing body works with academy leaders to monitor regularly the views of parents and carers. For example, governors analyse participation in progress meetings and seek parental feedback when changes are made to communications, such as progress reports. Parental support is very strong.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong focus on keeping pupils safe. Procedures are fully in place and leaders and governors fulfil their statutory duties effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- High-quality teaching across the academy enables pupils to make strong and sustained progress. Teachers’ passion for their subject and teaching promotes stimulating learning. Their very secure subject knowledge contributes to well-structured lessons that build pupils’ knowledge and skills incrementally. This enables teachers and the pupils to draw on prior learning very effectively.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are mutually respectful. Collaboration between pupils is promoted very successfully through paired or group activities. This creates a very positive climate for learning in which pupils learn from mistakes or misconceptions because they are willing to express different views or hypotheses.
- Teachers adapt their plans well to meet the needs of different learners. The detailed guidance given to teachers by the special educational needs coordinator contributes to very effective support for this group. The most-able pupils are challenged well through more difficult work or through discussion that promotes further depth of understanding.
- Communication skills are developed extremely well across subjects. Pupils use an impressive range of specialist vocabulary because new words and meanings are introduced in context. Teachers encourage pupils to communicate clearly and convincingly. In a Year 7 French lesson, the teachers’ insistence on pronunciation promoted an authentic discourse between pupils in the target language.
- Pupils are taught how to succeed. This ranges from guidance about organisation, planning and presentation through to subject-specific skills required to do well. A Year 11 pupil in an art lesson was looking forward to working with a visiting artist who uses wire as a drawing medium, being aware that his use of traditional drawing tools limited his achievement. He retained a love of the subject and determination to do well.
- The feedback pupils receive from their teachers contributes to their high achievement. Work to apply the academy’s marking policy consistently has proved particularly effective in subjects such as mathematics. Pupils’ responses show how they are mastering techniques. In some but not all subjects, teachers ensure that spelling, punctuation and grammar are used correctly.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils in lessons and over time. For example, learning about graphs in a Year 8 mathematics lesson started briskly with computer-based problem-solving activities that immediately challenged the pupils. Teachers’ effective management of time contributes to pupils’ productivity. For example, short activities that appeal to pupils’ competitive spirit are carefully balanced with longer opportunities to pursue ideas or refine work. Homework is used very well to reinforce learning in class. These qualities help pupils reach or exceed the high standards expected.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The personal qualities that pupils develop make a significant contribution to their academic achievement and progression into further or higher education or employment. Pupils are mature and proud ambassadors of the academy.
- Pupils understand how to stay safe at the academy and when not supervised. They have great confidence in the academy's systems to prevent different forms of bullying, discrimination or extremism. Any concerns are followed up thoroughly. Pupils' welfare is genuinely a shared responsibility between staff and pupils.
- The academy's programme of personal, social and health education includes topics relevant to pupils' welfare and the care of others. This was reflected in the boys' engagement in a form-time discussion focused on abortion. The academy successfully challenges gender stereotypes, encouraging the pupils to value diversity. Many pupils contribute to charity work designed to support vulnerable groups.
- The academy's code of conduct was informed by the pupils. The academy provides many opportunities for pupils to articulate their views. This includes regular representation at meetings of the governing body. During the inspection, candidates for the local Youth Parliament shared their planned policies in assembly.
- Pupils receive high-quality, impartial careers advice and guidance from specialists. This includes opportunities for pupils to receive mentoring from the business community. As a result, pupils make informed choices related to options, careers and employment. Reflecting the academy's culture, careful consideration is given to academic requirements alongside the personal qualities required to do well.
- The academy makes effective use of internal and external resources to ensure that pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable feel well looked after. The attention given to pupils' individual needs on transfer to the academy helps to overcome any early anxieties they might have.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are able to concentrate on their learning because high levels of cooperation are established between pupils and with staff. They show respect for adults and their peers. This includes respect for views that might differ from their own.
- Pupils maximise opportunities to learn. For example, they listen carefully to others, contribute confidently to form-time and class discussions and complete their school- and homework conscientiously. They act on the strong support and guidance provided by their teachers, for example to manage their work efficiently.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes to school are reflected in high levels of attendance. Punctuality, politeness and perseverance are the norm; pupils rarely give up when given a challenge. Their conduct around the academy is courteous, which is particularly evident when girls join the school for lessons in the sixth form.
- Pupils participate fully in school life. A very high proportion take on responsibilities and contribute to voluntary activities. The wide range of interests that pupils develop include Japanese, film, barbershop singing, Pilates and big band music besides commitment to other schemes designed to develop their resilience, leadership and creativity.
- The enthusiasm of pupils for classwork and extra-curricular activities reflects their strong awareness of keeping healthy mentally, emotionally and physically. The Hitchin Boys' Chronicle, written by the pupils, contains many articles that reflect very positive behaviours in and out of school, in England and abroad.

Outcomes for pupils are outstanding

- Pupils make excellent progress across a wide range of subjects to attain standards well above schools and academies nationally. The proportion at aged 16 attaining five or more high GCSE grades including English and mathematics is consistently exceptionally high. A very high proportion continue into the sixth form where rates of progress remain high across subjects.
- Effective work with primary schools to ease pupils' transition and a swift analysis of pupils' starting points in Year 7 enables pupils to progress quickly. Many pupils have attained above-average standards in English and mathematics when tested at primary school. Nevertheless, recent visits by staff to primary schools show how high outcomes for pupils are underpinned by high expectations at Hitchin Boys' School.

- Work to accelerate the progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is highly effective. Early and detailed analysis of their individual needs, communicated clearly and constructively to staff, contributes to the strong progress they make. In some subjects, their progress is even more rapid than their peers because teachers focus sharply on the skills required to succeed in the subject.
- Although continuously narrowing, the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers showed that the former's progress was slower until recently. Rapid progress, reflected in the academy's information about pupils' achievement and in their current work, reflects the more effective support now provided for this small group of pupils.
- The rising proportion of A*–A grades attained at GCSE and A level reflects the strong progress made by the most-able pupils. Meticulous analysis of pupils' test and examination results contributes to precise targeting of relative areas of underachievement. For example, a dip in the school's GCSE English results in 2015 has led to current pupils making significant improvement, on track to achieve high standards.
- Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as the majority of pupils who are White British. This reflects the value given by the academy to diversity regardless of ethnicity. This has a very positive impact on the confident, expressive skills that pupils use to achieve high outcomes in some subjects.
- Pupils who take vocational courses achieve qualifications that prepare them very well for their future. This includes the very small proportion of pupils who use alternative provision off site. The work experience that all pupils undertake in Year 10 and informative careers education and guidance contribute to almost no pupils not being in employment, education or training.
- A wide range of additional achievements include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Arts Award, Science CREST Award and Sports Leader Award.

16 to 19 study programmes

are outstanding

- The sixth form makes a very positive contribution to the ethos of the academy. Sixth formers are strong role models to younger pupils, evident in the practical support and guidance they provide. Sixth-form ambassadors contribute to a very wide range of activities. The sixth form is an aspiration for many pupils because it is a very purposeful place of study that leads to high achievement.
- Leaders evaluate the quality of sixth-form teaching, learning and assessment analytically to ensure that excellence is pursued throughout the 16 to 19 study programmes offered. Very effective collaboration with local schools contributes to strong quality assurance which draws on a breadth of expertise.
- Swift induction into the sixth form and systematic support as learners progress through their courses underpin the excellent progress they make. In almost all subjects, learners make better progress than that in sixth forms nationally. Learners' starting points are not all high, reflecting the school's confidence in getting learners onto the study programmes best suited to their career aspirations. Nevertheless, their progress is rapid.
- Mature relationships contribute to high-quality learning in the sixth form. Teachers pitch lessons at an appropriately high level, strike an excellent balance between using their knowledge and that of the learners, promote discussion very skilfully between learners, and use homework very productively in class. The detailed feedback learners receive following assignments and tests helps to boost their performance.
- Learners receive detailed, constructive feedback from teachers sharply focused on the knowledge and skills required to do well in their subject. This enables sixth formers to develop high levels of ownership of their work, using research and consulting their teachers or peers very selectively. Attitudes to learning are very positive, driven by learners' determination to succeed and clarity about the destinations they intend to reach.
- Almost all sixth formers complete their study programmes and progress to sustained education, employment, training or apprenticeships. These include destinations to prestigious universities and unusual settings, such as a golf scholarship in the United States. At around 80%, the proportion of sixth formers progressing to their first choice of university is high. They are very confident that their academic and personal development at Hitchin Boys' School provides an excellent foundation for their future.

School details

Unique reference number	117502
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10003554

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,050
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kerr McPhee
Headteacher	Martin Brown
Telephone number	01462 432181
Website	www.hbs.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@hitchinboys.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 March 2011

Information about this school

- This academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is below average. This is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The large majority of pupils are White British. The number from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The academy is the lead school in the North Hertfordshire School Direct Consortium and a member of the management group of the North Hertfordshire Teaching School Alliance.
- The sixth form at the academy is part of a consortium with Hitchin Girls' School and The Priory School.
- Two pupils currently access alternative provision at the North Hertfordshire Education Support Centre.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made 24 short visits and 28 more extended observations of pupils' learning in lessons, including 29 observations with senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors observed the pupils in assembly, at form time, in class, in the library and at informal times such as during break- and lunchtime.
- Inspectors met with governors, senior staff, middle leaders and pupils from different year groups. Feedback to members of staff included discussions about the academy.
- A representative of the local authority discussed the school with inspectors.
- Inspectors analysed 61 free-text responses completed by members of staff.
- The inspection team considered 204 parental responses to Parent View, the online survey provided by Ofsted, together with 87 free-text responses from parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the academy's performance, the school improvement plan, information relating to the quality of teaching, information about pupils' progress, academy policies and procedures, and the academy's arrangements for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Ian Middleton, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Kathryn Herlock	Ofsted Inspector
David Hutton	Ofsted Inspector
Pete Sewell	Ofsted Inspector
Sharon Wilson	Ofsted Inspector

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