

Inspection of Hatfield Community Free School

Briars Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 8ES

Inspection dates:	11 and 12 March 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspections because it was judged 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 May 2014.

The principal of this school is Victoria Hobson. Hatfield Community Free School is a single academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Maxine Kinghorn.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive in this welcoming and inclusive school. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), follow a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils' achievement in national tests and assessments is in line with the outcomes achieved by pupils nationally.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They feel safe and know who to talk to if they have a concern. Pupils understand and consistently follow the school's simple rules, 'be ready, be respectful and be safe.' Children in the early years settle quickly into the school's routines and learn very well together.

Pupils value the help the school provides for their social and emotional well-being. This support for pupils is a strength of the school's provision. Bullying is rare. Staff take swift and effective action if it does occur. Pupils appreciate the extra-curricular clubs they can choose to attend such as cooking, choir and football. The school is beginning to extend this offer so that pupils can pursue their interests.

There are very strong relationships between staff and pupils. This results in a harmonious learning environment. All members of the school community celebrate the school's diversity. They understand why it is important to respect different cultures and ways of life.

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

The school's curriculum is ambitious. The school considers carefully how to ensure that it enthuses and inspires pupils. For example, leaders create 'projects' that bring together different aspects of pupils' learning in geography, history, art and design, and design and technology. In places, the school is not as specific as it could be when deciding exactly what pupils should learn and when. This means that sometimes pupils do not build up their knowledge and understanding effectively.

Children in the early years grasp ideas well and develop the basic knowledge they need to be successful. For example, in Reception, children develop their mathematical and language skills. Pupils across the school are encouraged to take risks and build their resilience in a safe and interactive environment.

Teachers use a range of strategies to teach the curriculum in lively and interactive ways. For example, pupils' work in science shows how they take part in practical investigations and develop strong scientific skills. Across the school, teachers mainly ask effective questions and address any misconceptions on the spot. Sometimes, teachers' checking of what pupils have learned is not as effective, which results in some gaps in understanding. As a result, some pupils do not gain a deeper understanding of what they have been taught.

Leaders prioritise reading across the school. From the start of Reception, children learn to read using phonics. Pupils and those at the early stages of reading develop the phonics knowledge and skills they need to read with fluency. Teachers make sure that pupils read books that match the sounds they know. They quickly identify pupils who are not as confident and put in place a range of appropriate support. This means that most pupils, including those with SEND or who are new to learning English, become fluent and enthusiastic readers. This love of reading continues throughout the school.

The school has ensured that there are effective systems for identifying pupils with SEND. It puts appropriate support in place. However, sometimes teaching is not consistently adapted to take account of pupils' individual needs. This means that some pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they could.

The school has established a well-thought-out, age-appropriate programme to support pupils' wider development. Teachers explain sensitive topics, such as healthy relationships, with care. The school creates a harmonious and inclusive environment. Pupils learn to respect other faiths and cultures. They appreciate visits to places such as outdoor activity centres or music competitions. The school is increasing these types of opportunities because they help to develop pupils' character and resilience.

Leaders have robust systems for ensuring pupils attend school regularly and on time. They work with families to ensure that pupils' welfare is monitored carefully. This means that attendance levels are improving. The school acts quickly if there are patterns of concern.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Most staff appreciate how leaders take their views into account when making the changes needed to improve the school further. Trustees know their school community very well. They hold leaders to account for the quality of education at the school but also consider staff welfare. Parents and carers are also positive about their child's experiences at school and, in particular, the care and support staff show on a regular basis.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In places, the curriculum does not set out precisely what pupils should learn and when. This means that some pupils do not gain a broad and deep enough understanding of what they need to know. The school should ensure that the quality of curriculum

thinking is consistent across all subjects, so that pupils learn as well as the school intends them to.

- At times, teaching does not consistently take account of pupils' individual needs as precisely as it should. As a result, the implementation of the curriculum does not enable some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or with SEND, to secure their understanding as well as it should. The academic achievement of some pupils is not as high as it could be. The school should ensure all staff have the expertise to make appropriate adaptations to teaching activities when necessary.

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	138201
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345336
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	417
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Maxine Kinghorn
Principal	Victoria Hobson
Website	www.hcfs.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	20 and 21 May 2014, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has been part of Hatfield Community Free School, a single academy trust, since 2012.
- The school currently uses one unregistered alternative provision.

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 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. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, music and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with the principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector met with trustees and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- 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.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

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His Majesty's Inspector

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