

Holmer Green Senior School

Parish Piece, Holmer Green, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP15 6SP

Inspection dates	24–25 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher leads the school with great purpose and energy. He has taken swift and effective action to improve teaching and learning across the school.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points in the majority of subjects across the school. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make similar progress to their peers.
- Senior and middle leaders work very well together to raise standards across the school. Teachers are very well supported to improve their teaching. As a result, much of the teaching across the school is very effective or improving rapidly.
- The teaching of art, design and textiles in the sixth form is outstanding because students make very substantial progress, attain the highest grades and move on to prestigious universities.
- Pupils achieve very well in mathematics and in many cases make outstanding progress from their starting points as a result of excellent teaching.
- Governance is highly effective. Governors have a very good knowledge of the school, take action quickly to support leaders and make the most of their expertise.
- Disadvantaged pupils are performing increasingly well. The gaps between these pupils and others are narrowing rapidly, especially in English and mathematics.
- Pupils behave well and are very respectful of each other and of adults. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern Britain. They are very aware of how to keep themselves safe.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some disadvantaged pupils are not yet making as rapid progress as other pupils in the school in some academic subjects.
- Some teaching does not challenge the most able so that they do not make as much progress as others.
- The teaching in the sixth form, although improving, is not yet ensuring students make good progress from their starting points in the majority of academic subjects.
- The attendance of students in the sixth form is not as high as for others in the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress of pupils who are achieving less well by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan activities that stretch and challenge the most able pupils
 - further developing teachers' approaches to support disadvantaged pupils in those academic subjects where they make less progress.

- Improve the progress that students make in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that all teaching is as good as in the highest-performing subjects such as art and design
 - raising the attendance of students so that they are rarely absent from school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher leads the school very well. He has established a very effective environment for learning, where the pupils want to do well and staff want to help them achieve their very best. The headteacher is respected by staff and pupils, who value the contribution he makes. He has successfully raised everyone's aspirations so that the school is ensuring 'Achievement and opportunity for all'.
- The headteacher is very well supported by his leadership team. They have tackled the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report with energy and zest. Senior leaders, some of whom are relatively new to their roles, have raised the expectations of staff and pupils so that more pupils are making rapid progress in many areas of the school than before.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders' planning for improvement is rigorous and robust because they use achievement information well to evaluate the impact of their work. All staff are very aware of the main priorities and the vast majority believe the school to be well led and managed.
- The leadership of teaching is good. There are very effective systems to support staff. For example, there are regular teaching and learning clinics, whole-staff training and weekly updates on key priorities. Teachers identify the 'open door' approach as a critical factor in helping them improve their teaching. Those staff who are new to the profession or require additional support receive high-quality guidance. The system to reward staff performance is well used by leaders and is both rigorous and fair.
- Middle leaders are increasingly effective. They are working well with senior leaders to improve the performance of their teams. They are increasingly sharing best practice between subjects and staff. Middle leaders are also much more confident about planning and sharing useful strategies within their own teams. As a result, standards are improving across the school.
- The leadership of special educational needs is a strength of the school. Pupils in the specialist unit make at least as good progress as other pupils because staff are well informed about the most effective strategies to use and teaching assistants are suitably trained. Leaders make good use of specialist advice and support so that additional resources are used appropriately.
- Leaders use the pupil premium grant increasingly well. There are strong systems in place to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Current pupils make good progress in many subjects and the gap is narrowing in most subjects, but especially in English and mathematics. However, leaders have identified that the gaps between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others are not closing as quickly in some academic subjects, and especially in humanities.
- The curriculum is stimulating and wide ranging. All pupils are able to choose from a broad variety of options in key stage 4 and experience the full range of vocational and academic subjects. Leaders have rightfully reviewed the curriculum to introduce more opportunities for pupils to develop a deeper understanding and mastery of topics. However, leaders acknowledge that they still have work to do to ensure that the most able can attain the highest grades. The school has also made the most of local links to establish a creative hub for art and design with two resident artists, as well as a strong focus on business and enterprise weaved through the formal and informal curriculum.
- The leadership of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is excellent and pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain. This is because leaders have developed a very effective approach that includes tutor time, religious education and a programme of visits from outside speakers. Pupils report that all staff expect them to achieve well, whatever their background or ethnicity. Pupils are also knowledgeable about democracy. In particular, they enjoyed the recent school referendum on whether to remain part of the European Union. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong which pervades all areas of the school, as well as a good understanding of sexual orientation.
- There is now an effective programme to support pupils moving on to further study, employment or education at the end of key stages 4 and 5. All pupils receive independent advice and guidance. Pupils in Year 10, Year 12 and Year 13 take part in work experience. There is a cohesive and well-planned approach to prepare pupils for the next stage of study or employment. As a result, the number of pupils continuing into further education, employment or training is increasing.
- The school works very effectively with local partners. The school improvement partner appointed by the Buckingham Learning Trust works well with leaders to support their evaluation and planning. The support from the local teaching alliance has also helped to raise standards in key areas such as science.

■ The governance of the school

- Governance is good. Governors made good use of the external review to evaluate the effectiveness of the governing body. As a result, governors took urgent steps to improve the leadership of the governing body as well as appoint additional governors to fill any gaps in their expertise.
 - Governors are very knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They check the work of leaders by visiting the school regularly and using the school improvement plan well to review progress made. They have also commissioned external reviews when they required additional expertise to test the impact of school leaders.
 - Governors have a much improved oversight of how well the funding for vulnerable pupils is spent. They exercise good oversight of the systems for rewarding teacher performance and ensure that they are suitably rigorous.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has suitable systems in place to keep pupils safe and staff are appropriately trained. Governors keep a close eye on this aspect of the school's work by regularly checking that systems are well managed. Consequently, pupils feel safe and well cared for. Pupils know what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns. Pupils and parents also highlighted this aspect of the school's work as a significant strength, with one parent commenting that the school has been 'extremely supportive', and another parent said their child 'was happy coming to school every day'.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is good. Teachers use the school's procedures well so that their planning and assessment ensure pupils make good progress. Teachers have high expectations of pupils so that in the vast majority of lessons pupils work hard. Teachers set high aspirational targets for pupils to achieve and use the additional information about pupils in the school's 'context sheets' to plan engaging and interesting lessons.
- The best teaching takes place when teachers give appropriate support for those who need it but also plan activities that allow the most able to broaden and deepen their knowledge. This personalised approach is particularly well developed in art and design, where pupils receive excellent guidance and support so that they produce work that is of a very high standard.
- Teaching in English is good. Pupils gain a good understanding of the key concepts of language and an increasingly good grasp of literature. In English, pupils are writing with more confidence and sophistication. For example, pupils' written work in Year 10 showed them learning difficult concepts thoroughly. Teachers use questioning adroitly so that pupils gain better understanding. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, pupils successfully assessed the different qualities of leadership of different characters in *Lord of The Flies* as a result of skilful questioning by teachers.
- Teaching in mathematics is excellent. Pupils gain a very good grasp of mathematical concepts and are especially adept at using them to solve problems. Teachers have worked well together to introduce the new curriculum so that the most able pupils are increasing their mastery of topics in mathematics. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, pupils were very confident in explaining how they could use Pi to calculate the area of different circular objects.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength of the school. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to develop interesting resources and pose challenging questions that enthuse and engage pupils. Teachers also use their subject knowledge well to develop pupils' technical vocabulary across subjects and across the school.
- Some less effective teaching does not make good use of the information about pupils to plan activities that either stretch them adequately or help disadvantaged pupils catch up quickly. Leaders acknowledge that this is an area that requires further attention and are addressing it through their teaching clinics and briefings.
- Teachers use the school's assessment policy well. They are providing high-quality guidance to pupils, the majority of whom use it successfully to improve their work. However, some pupils are less confident in using teachers' advice and as a result these pupils are not improving their work as effectively as others. Teachers are managing the new grading system well and overall the vast majority of pupils know how well they are achieving and what they need to do to get to the next grade.
- The teaching of literacy is improving. There is a school-wide approach to developing more sophisticated language and improving pupils' extended writing. This focus on developing literacy has made a significant

difference to pupils' performance in English and is beginning to address the lower performance of some pupils in the humanities subjects. The school has effective systems in place to promote good presentation so work in pupils' books is neat and accurate.

- Pupils enjoy a wide range of additional activities that help them learn beyond the classroom. There are music, drama, dance, art and sports clubs after school. There are also a number of educational visits, including trips to international destinations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The attendance of pupils is improving and is now above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability is improving significantly compared with previous years. There are very effective systems in place to support those pupils who struggle to attend, and pupils with health difficulties are supported particularly well.
- Exclusions for poor behaviour are well below the national average and declining from previous years. The staff in the 'Hub' provide very strong support for those pupils who need additional guidance and help.
- Pupils play a full and active role in the life of the school. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills as prefects and peer mentors. In the sixth form and Year 11, pupils volunteer to help supervise at lunchtimes and all sixth form students volunteer in different departments for an hour a week. Pupils also represent the school in more formal settings, such as open days and parents' evenings. Pupils in key stage 4 also take part in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. Most impressively, pupils from all year groups can become student commissioners who work with school leaders to improve aspects of the school. So far, the commissioners have given leaders feedback about the quality of teaching and the environment, resulting in changes to how the school is run.
- Pupils feel safe and report that they are exceptionally well looked after. They know that if they raise concerns with staff, their concerns are resolved swiftly. Pupils are very well informed about the risks of using social media and know the best strategies to keep themselves safe online. They are very aware of extremism and are knowledgeable about how to prevent themselves from becoming radicalised. They also talk confidently about other risks and how to avoid them in social settings. The overwhelming majority of parents agree that pupils are well cared for and happy.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils report that behaviour has improved a great deal, and that low-level disruption is rare and is dealt with firmly.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils work well together, and listen attentively to each other and the teacher. The majority of pupils are confident in expressing their thoughts and sharing their ideas. The majority of pupils commit to improving their work but some are not making the most of teachers' advice to deepen their learning.
- Pupils are polite, respectful and helpful. At social times, they regulate themselves well. For example, during a wet break pupils were calm and orderly with minimal need for supervision. They respond very quickly to staff if any problems do occur.
- Pupils report that bullying is very rare and that when it does occur it is dealt with effectively. They are knowledgeable about the different kinds of bullying, especially homophobic and cyber bullying. The school has a very effective anti-bullying council which has won the Diana Memorial award for its work.
- Pupils move about the building calmly and quietly, despite the very narrow corridors and stairways. Pupils wear their uniform well, take great care of the environment and are proud of their school.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- In 2015, although the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics fell slightly, it was still above the national average. Achievement was significantly above the national average in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics in 2015 was very strong, with significantly more pupils making expected or better progress than similar pupils nationally from every starting point. In English, pupils made similar rates of progress to the national average.

- Current information shows that pupils in Year 11 are on track to attain well and make strong progress. In subjects where pupils have previously underperformed, such as English literature, religious studies, information technology and media studies, the proportion of pupils achieving A* to C grades is predicted to increase. A higher proportion of pupils are expected to make at least expected progress in English and mathematics in 2016.
- Pupils in most other year groups are making good progress over time. Leaders' careful monitoring of pupil progress throughout the year means teachers know which pupils are underachieving and take appropriate steps to address this with additional support or intervention.
- In 2015, a similar proportion of disadvantaged pupils made expected progress in English and mathematics compared to other pupils nationally from the majority of their starting points. Current information suggests that disadvantaged pupils are making more progress than before. This is especially the case in Year 8 where these pupils are outperforming their peers. This is as a result of more effective use of additional funding to support the needs of disadvantaged pupils.
- In 2015, a higher than average proportion of pupils achieved the highest grades in art and design, core science and additional science. In other subjects, the progress of the most able pupils is not as strong, so leaders have introduced more challenging targets to stretch these pupils more effectively.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability achieved well in 2015. However, in key stage 3, a few of these pupils are currently making less progress than their peers. Leaders are addressing this robustly with a range of strategies and improved training for teachers so that they can meet the needs of these pupils more effectively. Pupils who are supported by the additional speech and language provision make progress in line with their peers as a result of skilful support from specialist teachers and additional adults.
- Leaders have rightly increased their focus on developing pupils' reading. As a result, pupils read more frequently both during weekly reading lessons and in their free time. They make good use of the library as they are borrowing an increasing number of books across a wider range of genres. Information from the school's reading programmes also shows that those pupils who need to catch up are doing so quickly.
- Leaders keep parents well informed about the progress of pupils. There is regular communication and useful advice to parents about the new assessment system as well as how to support pupils at home.

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement. While teaching is improving in many subjects and is highly effective in art and design, there is still too much teaching that does not ensure students make rapid enough progress from their starting points.
- The new leadership in the sixth form is increasingly effective. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision. Standards are improving but much more quickly for Year 12 students because leaders have improved the advice they gave pupils prior to joining the sixth form.
- Students enter the sixth form with broadly average attainment. In 2015, students' progress was broadly average in both academic and vocational subjects. Year 12 has been well guided and current information shows that they are on course to achieve well this year. Year 13 students did not achieve well in 2015 in their end of year exams and, as a result, some did not continue their courses. Current information shows that they are achieving less well in academic qualifications than in vocational courses.
- Leaders have introduced a range of strategies to improve standards in the sixth form, including training to improve students' engagement, setting more ambitious targets and increasing the monitoring and oversight of the sixth form. As a result, more students are reaching their targets in more subjects. This is especially the case in Year 12.
- Students who do not achieve a grade C at GCSE in English or mathematics are well supported. The majority achieve this qualification as a result, which is a higher proportion than is the case nationally for these students.
- All students are taught well about how to keep themselves safe and have good awareness of the risks of social media and other dangers.
- The attendance of students in the sixth form requires improvement. This is especially the case in Year 13, where attendance is below the national average.
- Students are given useful guidance to prepare for the next steps in their lives. In 2015, an increasing number of students moved on to higher education. This is broadly in line with the national average but is predicted to increase in 2016.

- There is an extensive enrichment programme in place that includes links with local universities and trips abroad. Students also take up important roles within the school such as peer prefects and mentors. Students also run the sixth form management team to organise whole-school fund-raising events and other charitable activities.

School details

Unique reference number	138058
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10012259

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary modern (non-selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	819
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Greenwood
Headteacher	Michael Jones
Telephone number	01494 712 219
Website	www.hgss.co.uk
Email address	office@hgss.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	January 2014

Information about this school

- Holmer Green is a smaller-than-average 11–18 mixed school, which converted to become an academy in 2012.
- There is a small sixth form provision, consisting predominantly of students who stay at the school after the end of Year 11.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is approximately half the national average.
- A smaller-than-average proportion of pupils are from multi-ethnic groups or speak English as an additional language.
- A very small proportion of pupils have special educational needs or disability. However, the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is more than three times the national average. Twenty of these pupils have speech and language difficulties and attend the speech and language resource unit in the school.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 30 full lessons and 15 part-lessons across a range of year groups and subjects. Some lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other staff, the school improvement partner and governors. Inspectors took account of the 28 responses to the confidential questionnaires received from staff.
- Inspectors evaluated the specialist provision and spoke to staff and pupils who access this.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents including the school's strategic planning, minutes of meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour and records related to pupils' safety and academic progress.
- Inspectors scrutinised books in lessons and a sample of disadvantaged pupils' English and mathematics books, alongside senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtimes, around the school and in assemblies, tutor periods and other activities.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally and formally as well as taking into account the 21 responses to confidential questionnaires received from pupils.
- Inspectors took into account the 108 responses from parents on Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents).

Inspection team

Seamus Murphy, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathryn Moles	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Goode	Her Majesty's Inspector
Susan Cox	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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