

Inspection of a good school: Horizons Academy Bexley

Lensbury Way, Abbey Wood, London SE2 9TA

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 March 2022

Outcome

Horizons Academy Bexley continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Horizons enjoy learning in this safe and supportive environment. They feel accepted, valued and treated fairly. Leaders and staff have created a 'compassionate culture with unwavering high expectations'. Pupils described the ethos of the school as 'caring and understanding'.

Pupils consider the adults to be a strength of the school. They feel assured that staff want the best for them. Staff challenge and encourage them to do well. The atmosphere is calm and orderly in lessons and around the school. Analysis of behaviour logs aligns with the pupils' view that bullying is not a feature in the school. Pupils say that this is because 'everyone gets on'. Staff are vigilant and diffuse situations before they escalate.

Pupils appreciate the trips and visits they experience, either because of the reward system or curriculum enrichment opportunities.

Relationships between staff and pupils are extremely positive. Pupils show respect for their peers and adults. They are well guided in overcoming personal and educational barriers. Staff prepare pupils with the 'readiness' for the next stage of their journey. This may include returning to a mainstream school, accessing further education or gaining employment. Pupils leave school equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to transition into other schools or adulthood.

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

Leaders have developed a coherent curriculum which includes a range of vocational subjects. They have clear end goals that teachers aim for by delivering well-planned learning experiences. Staff work hard in personalising the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils on entry to the school and from their various starting points. They ensure that the curriculum is not 'watered down'. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. Staff discuss key vocabulary in detail during lessons. This strengthens pupils' understanding of subject-specific terminology and content. Pupils revisit knowledge they have learned as part of

the 'flashback' session at the start of each lesson. In mathematics lessons, teachers guide pupils well in drawing on prior knowledge to support learning new concepts.

Leaders place reading at the centre of the curriculum. This underpins the high ambitions they have of wanting pupils to be fluent readers. The school has adopted new approaches to the teaching of phonics and reading. These are in their early stages and becoming more consistent in how staff teach reading. Teachers speak with enthusiasm about how the programmes are helping to engage reluctant readers with reading. The books match the sounds that pupils know. Adults use a variety of strategies to address the barriers to, and gaps in, pupils' communication skills. As a result, pupils develop self-esteem and confidence as readers and learners. In the primary phase, pupils read to themselves or with/to an adult. They enjoy the stories teachers read to them daily.

Pupils take active part in discussions. They listen with intent and use each other's ideas as springboards for their own creativity, inspiration and learning. Adults use calm voices when speaking to pupils, especially towards those who are in crisis. They apply the high expectations of the school's behaviour policy with consistency. Staff routinely look for opportunities to celebrate pupils' success. This motivates pupils to do well and enjoy the benefits of the school's reward system.

Personal development is the 'heartbeat' of the school. Many pupils testify of how their behaviour, attitudes and attendance have improved since attending the school. Such success enables high proportions of pupils to return to mainstream schools or go on to their next stage. Adults provide pupils with opportunities that reflect their interests and talents. The school's approach to careers information, education, advice and guidance is exemplary. The care and advice given to pupils extends beyond Year 11. Pupils see this as an important component in their future success in employment or further education.

Staff provide supportive resources to pupils with medical and/or social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs to learn well. They work with pupils, parents and carers to identify and address pupils' needs. Pupils contribute to setting personal learning, pastoral and behaviour targets. They share, with delight, a sense of success when they achieve their goals. Staff help pupils challenged with social anxiety to develop their social interaction skills with people in public.

Leaders ensure purposeful and carefully measured decision-making occurs at all levels. They do this with the best interest of pupils typically in mind. The trust has been instrumental in shaping the leadership and management structure of the school. Staff welcome and appreciate the senior leaders new to posts and those seconded to the school. They recognise the difference this is making to the strategic direction and operation of the school. Staff also show approval of the positive impact on the quality of education provided. They say workload is manageable and leaders offer opportunities to develop their skills and careers. Staff describe the school as 'inspiring, encouraging and empowering'. The local authority and schools that work in partnership with Horizons value the effective support they receive from the outreach team.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The safeguarding team works closely with the trust in ensuring that pupils' safety is a priority, in and out of the school. Staff have developed substantial links with external agencies and the local authority.

Staff take time to get to know and understand pupils well. They are appropriately trained in recognising small changes in pupils' behaviour or language. Staff show vigilance in spotting and reporting risks or potential dangers.

Adults teach crucial life skills and knowledge to pupils. This includes learning about healthy relationships and knowing how to say 'no', when meeting people online or in person.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Leaders have introduced some new initiatives, particularly in reading. These programmes are in their early stages. They are affecting success in teaching and pupils' attainment positively. Leaders should continue to embed these programmes of study. They should ensure that staff are consistent in delivering these approaches in practice.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Pathways Short Stay School, to be good in March 2013.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	144407
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	10212300
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Burnett
Executive Headteacher	Neil Miller
Head of School	Grant Monaghan
Website	horizonsbexley.org.uk/horizons
Date of previous inspection	17 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the London South East Academies Trust in November 2017. The academy council carries out some functions on behalf of the trustees.
- The school caters for primary- and secondary-aged pupils who have been excluded or at risk of exclusion.
- The number of pupils fluctuates from month to month depending on referrals from mainstream schools.
- The school has a satellite centre that caters for secondary-aged pupils who have medical and/or SEMH needs.
- The head of school has been in post since September 2021.
- In September 2021, the trust carried out a reorganisation of leadership team and seconded three senior leaders from within the trust to work in the school.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Meetings were held with the chief executive officer, the chairs of the trust and provision board, the executive headteacher, senior leaders, a range of staff, trustees, members of the academy council, a local authority representative and leaders from partner schools. Meetings were also held with pupils and a small group of parents.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, English, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of curriculum plans and documents including the school's self-evaluation of the work it does and the school development plan.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by scrutinising records and the single central record. They spoke with leaders and staff, and held discussions with pupils and parents.
- Inspectors considered the opinions of staff through Ofsted's online surveys. There were 36 responses from staff, and no responses from pupils or parents.
- Inspectors visited all of the school sites, including the satellite centre for secondary-aged pupils with medical and/or SEMH needs.

Inspection team

Lascelles Haughton, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ann Pratt

Ofsted Inspector

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