

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Heights Blackburn

Heys Lane, Blackburn, Lancashire BB2 4NW

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 February 2025

Outcome

The Heights Blackburn has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Gary Holding. This school is part of the Education Partnership Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Sharon Roscoe, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ian Brown.

What is it like to attend this school?

Everyone is made to feel welcome at this school. Many pupils arrive following poor experiences in education. The school sets high expectations to help pupils settle and be ready to reconnect with education. Pupils are listened to, respected and valued by staff. They are happy and safe here.

The school has high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Staff are highly skilled at adapting the curriculum to meet pupils' individual needs. Older pupils succeed in gaining a range of vocational awards and academic qualifications. Typically, pupils achieve well from their various starting points.

The school's caring atmosphere makes a significant contribution to pupils' growing self-esteem and to their sense of belonging. Typically, classrooms are harmonious and purposeful. Across the school, pupils behave well.

The school provides pupils with the tools that they need to succeed in life. Opportunities to strengthen pupils' resilience and social skills are wide-ranging. Pupils enjoy a broad range of activities such as visits to a music studio, an escape room and salon facilities. They relish the range of outdoor experiences on offer. The school carefully plans trips and visits that help support the development of pupils' social, communication and employability skills.

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

The school is clear about what it wants pupils to achieve during their time at The Heights Blackburn. Its mission is to prepare pupils to return to mainstream school or successfully go on to post-16 education. The school achieves this aim exceptionally well.

The school has designed an ambitious curriculum. Across subjects, the school has mapped out the essential knowledge that teachers expect pupils to learn. Teachers explain new ideas and concepts by breaking them down into simple parts and checking that pupils understand. This helps pupils to deepen their learning. However, on occasion, teachers do not make timely checks on what pupils know and remember. At times, gaps in pupils' subject knowledge can go unnoticed, particularly for those pupils with lower rates of attendance. Occasionally, this means that teachers do not know what subject content pupils need to revisit and practise before moving on to new learning. This hinders some aspects of pupils' achievement.

The school has fostered a palpable reading culture. Pupils who struggle to read are quickly identified. Staff offer targeted support to help these pupils catch up swiftly with their peers. Younger pupils are supported well by the trust's handwriting programme. They quickly develop the pen-grip and posture skills they need for effective letter formation.

The school successfully unpicks pupils' additional needs and any barriers to learning that they may have. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) experience a smooth transition into the school because this is meticulously planned. Staff receive regular information on the additional learning needs of pupils. This ensures that the needs of these pupils are met securely in the classroom.

Across the school community, the culture of positive behaviour permeates every classroom. With up-beat music playing and a high ratio of supervising staff, pupils' movement is fuss-free at lesson changeovers. Lunchtime in the school's canteen is a sociable event as staff and pupils eat and play pool together.

Many pupils' attendance quickly improves once they join the school. The school employs a variety of strategies to promote regular attendance. It works closely with families and provides effective support for pupils who face challenges in attending school regularly.

The emphasis on the broader development of pupils is a golden thread through all that the school does. There is a range of carefully designed opportunities that help to develop pupils' independence and self-confidence. Pupils gain valuable knowledge to support them in growing up in modern Britain. For example, they learn about the dangers associated with substance misuse, vaping and social media.

Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps after finishing school. They value work-related learning and strong career advice. Pupils benefit from robust transitions back to mainstream school or to post-16 provision. Typically, pupils secure places on college courses well matched to their aspirations and goals.

Trustees and members of the local governing body evaluate accurately the quality of provision for its pupils. Their precise oversight ensures continual school improvement. Staff feel valued and supported well to develop and share their expertise. They work as a team and are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- At times, teachers' checks on learning, especially when pupils have been absent, are not timely enough to spot gaps in pupils' knowledge. As a result, some pupils are insecure in their learning. The school should ensure that teachers swiftly identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge so that they can learn well.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2014.

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	139413
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10321438
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Free school alternative provision
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ian Brown
CEO of the trust	Sharon Roscoe
Headteacher	Gary Holding
Website	www.theheightsfreeschool.org
Date of previous inspection	14 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Heights Free School is part of the Education Partnership Trust.
- The school provides short, medium and longer-term placements for pupils who have disengaged from education, have been permanently excluded or are at risk of exclusion from education.
- A small number of pupils have an education, health and care plan. Places are commissioned by different local authorities.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- 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 judgement 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 met with the headteacher and with other school leaders. They also spoke with members of the trust, including the CEO of the trust. Additionally, they spoke with the local governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of their work. They also considered the school's self-evaluation document, along with other documentation and analysis provided by the school.
- The lead inspector met with the SEND coordinators and reviewed samples of documentation relating to pupils with SEND.
- 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 took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Kate Bowker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gary Anders

Ofsted Inspector

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