

Inspection of a good school: Hall Cross Academy

Thorne Road, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN1 2HY

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 May 2023

Outcome

Hall Cross Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Hall Cross Academy is an inclusive school. Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare. If it does occur, leaders take swift and effective action. Pupils feel safe in school because they trust the adults who support them. One pupil's comment, which captures the opinion of many, was 'You can be whoever you want to be here.' Staff know pupils well and care about them as individuals.

Leaders, together with staff, want all pupils to achieve their best, both personally and academically. Pupils and students respond well to these high expectations. They enjoy their learning and achieve well in a range of academic and vocational subjects.

High expectations for pupils' behaviour mean that lessons are positive and purposeful. Pupils appreciate how these high expectations help them to learn better. Behaviour is calm around the school. Pupils are polite and friendly. Overwhelmingly, there are positive relationships between pupils and staff.

Pupils can take part in a vast range of extra-curricular clubs. These are well attended by pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils told inspectors, 'There is a club for everybody and it helps pupils make friends.'

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

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils at Hall Cross Academy. The curriculum is at the heart of this ambition. Leaders have high aspirations for pupils to achieve the best possible qualifications. Subject leaders share this ambition and have considered what pupils should learn and the order in which things are taught. At the present time, there are too few pupils taking modern languages and humanities. This limits the number studying the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). Leaders are aware of this.

During lessons, teachers check pupils' understanding using questioning and 'live' marking. Through this, they spot misconceptions in pupils' learning and address any errors

straightaway. However, teachers' use of assessment in lessons is inconsistent. In some subjects, such as English and mathematics, teachers are able to pinpoint areas of weakness in pupils' acquisition of knowledge and skills. In some other subjects, assessment is not as systematic and methodical. It does not contribute as well to pupils' learning.

Leaders have prioritised reading. This helps all pupils to access the full curriculum. Pupils have regular opportunities to read or to be read to. Leaders have ensured that pupils who struggle with reading get the help that they need to read fluently. These pupils are quickly becoming confident readers who enjoy reading for pleasure.

Pupils with SEND follow the same ambitious curriculum. Teachers and other staff understand their needs well and adapt teaching appropriately to meet pupils' needs. There are effective systems to support pupils with SEND, and their progress is carefully checked. As a result, they achieve well.

Students in the sixth form can choose to study a wide range of subjects. Sixth-form students feel exceptionally well supported by their teachers and appreciate the efforts that teachers go to in supporting them with their learning. Sixth-form students achieve very well and move on to appropriate destinations. Students are rightly proud of their sixth form.

Pupils, including those in the sixth form, receive high-quality careers guidance from the moment they join Hall Cross Academy. Through university visits, talks from professionals and work experience, pupils are prepared fully for their next steps in education, employment and training.

Pupils benefit from a well-planned personal development programme. Leaders have carefully considered the best order to teach topics in, which include online safety, drugs awareness, healthy relationships and knife crime. All pupils learn about different beliefs and cultures.

The extra-curricular opportunities, including theatre trips and visiting speakers, that leaders provide to broaden pupils' and students' wider development are a strength of the school. These are open to all, and there is something to suit all talents and interests. Pupils and students value the programme of extra-curricular activities, and attendance at these is high.

Staff are proud to work at this school. They feel valued and appreciate the high-quality professional development that they receive from the school. They say that leaders are mindful of their workload.

Trustees and governors are committed to the school. They regularly visit the school to speak to staff and pupils, as well as having regular meetings with the principal. They offer appropriate challenge and support to help leaders continue to develop the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture across the school. Leaders are well informed about a wide range of safeguarding issues. They ensure that safeguarding training for staff is thorough. As a result, staff know how to identify the signs that may indicate that pupils are at risk of harm. Staff share their concerns in a timely manner. Leaders work well with external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the help they need.

Pupils say they feel safe and have a trusted adult they can talk to if needed.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The number of pupils who choose to study a language, geography or history at key stage 4 is low. This means that some pupils are not studying a broad range of EBacc subjects. Leaders should consider and implement the best ways to ensure that more pupils continue to study these subjects after key stage 3.
- Leaders are aware that there is some inconsistency in assessment. In some subjects, pupils' misconceptions are not remedied well enough. This leads to gaps in pupils' understanding. Leaders should ensure that the best practice across the school in assessment is applied across all subjects. This will help pupils to learn more of the curriculum over time.

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 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 in April 2014.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use 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](#)' 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	137842
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	102692068
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,892
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	403
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Blount
Principal	Simon Swain
Website	http://www.hallcrossacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A very small number of pupils attend alternative provision. These pupils attend three registered providers and four unregistered providers.
- The school is part of the Exceed Learning Partnership.
- The school has a sixth form.
- Leaders' approach to careers education ensures that the requirements of the provider access legislation are met. This requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- Inspectors spoke with the principal and other senior leaders, including subject leaders, staff and members of the trust and governing body. Inspectors spoke to staff at one alternative provision.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. 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. Lessons were also visited in geography and history.
- Inspectors visited lessons in the sixth form and had discussions with students and the leader of the sixth form.
- Inspectors spoke to many pupils and students about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' and students' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's records of safeguarding checks and referrals to the local authority. Inspectors spoke to staff about how they keep pupils safe. Inspectors also asked the pupils how they keep themselves safe and what they do if they have concerns.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Tudor Griffiths, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Julian Appleyard	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Hassack	Ofsted Inspector

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